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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SEPARATE SPHERES: GENDER APARTHEID IN CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S SHIRLEY

by

ELIZABETH ENTRUP

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Separate Spheres: Gender Apartheid in Charlotte Brontë's Shirley," submitted by Elizabeth Entrup in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Supervisor

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the theme of gender apartheid, the legally sanctioned separation of the male and female spheres, in Charlotte Brontë's Shirley. Initially, I shall discuss the reasons for the widespread critical disapprobation of the novel. My contention is that this depreciation occurred mainly because the work differs from Brontë's other novels, being centered on the life of a community rather than on a single individual, and because of the difficulty critics have encountered in interpreting the conclusion.

The first chapter provides an overview of the novel's community, particularly the conflicts between the sexes and among various socio-economic groups at the onset of the Industrial Revolution. An analogy is drawn between two sectors marginalized by patriarchy, women and the working class, both of whom face near-insurmountable obstacles in their attempts to ameliorate their respective positions when opposed by the long-established ruling class. Moreover, in an age increasingly dominated by male industrialists and labor-saving machines, many women and workers face the possibility of becoming redundant, relegated to the categories of "old maid" and "the unemployed." The futility inherent in such a situation is dramatised in Caroline Helstone, who, having been rejected by the industrialist Robert Moore because of her poverty, finds life as a spinster intolerably pointless and bleak.

The second chapter focuses on the principal heroine, Shirley Keeldar, who functions as an antithesis to the general passivity of the female sphere. The depiction of the relationship between Shirley and Caroline suggests the beneficial effects of female bonding, but also its limitations: although friendship provides relief from a male-centered world in which women are largely disregarded, it cannot

eradicate the ingrained notion that marriage is the only viable option for women.

The novel's conclusion highlights, and subverts, the importance placed on marriage, and the desirability of female submission to male domination in marital relationships. The independent Shirley disappointingly adheres to this notion by marrying her domineering former tutor, Louis Moore. Simultaneously, it is implied that the difficulty Louis encounters in subjugating her is analogous to the obstacles his brother Robert encounters in implementing industrial methods in a society resistant to change. The novel's personal aspects are thus linked to a larger historical framework.

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INTRODUCTION

> If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool, and solid lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning, when all who have work wake with the consciousness that they must rise and betake themselves thereto.
>
> Charlotte Brontë, Shirley

Shirley has long been considered an oddity in the Brontë canon, and until recently it has received relatively little critical attention (and still less approbation) in comparison to better-known works such as Jane Eyre. The general consensus once was that Shirley was Brontë's attempt at a "social problem" novel in the mode of Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, an experiment in a currently popular literary genre which was not a great literary success and which she never again attempted.

In its style and subject matter, Shirley differs considerably from her other novels. Whereas Brontë's works usually focus on a single central consciousness and employ a first-person narrator, Shirley's readers are led through the community of Briarfield and into the minds of its inhabitants by a third-person, sometimes (but not always) omniscient narrator. John Maynard designates this narrator as "that benevolent, worldly, and aging gentleman, Currer Bell" (151), a description which presumably refers to his or her resemblance to the jovial, loquacious persona commonly found in the works of Thackeray, an author whom Brontë admired and whose narrative style she likely imitated. Actually, all the reader knows about "Mr. Bell" (if in fact this persona is male) is, to quote Maynard again, that he/she "claims a wide acquaintance with times and places" (151). The preoccupation with time and place is in fact a key aspect of Shirley. Whereas all dates and place names in Jane Eyre end in blanks, so that the reader knows only that the novel takes place

somewhere in nineteenth-century England, and a similarly timeless effect is achieved in The Professor and Villette by setting them in Belgium at some vaguely-stated time in the past, Shirley is placed from the outset in 1812 Yorkshire with the Luddite riots in the foreground and the Napoleonic wars as a backdrop.

Another differentiating feature is the emphasis on community. Rather than focussing solely on a single individual's lonely struggle in an alien, often hostile environment as do The Professor, Jane Eyre and Villette, Shirley characterizes the wide range of social "types" who comprise the socio-economic world of Briarfield. These characters range from the industrialists, clergymen and curates who are the powerful forces, to the wives, mothers, daughters, "old maids," workers (usually unemployed) and the poor who play subordinate roles. However, as Brontë demonstrates throughout the novel, individual struggles can be lonely and difficult in the midst of a normal English community, particularly for those members of it who are disenfranchised and marginalized by a powerful patriarchy. It is not coincidental that the name of the community is Briarfield, for "normal" English life causes considerable pain to those sectors of society who are considered redundant.

Although successful commercially and for the most part critically at the time of its publication in 1849, Shirley has often been subjected to harsh reviews by literary critics, until recent revaluations by feminist critics such as Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Helene Moglen. Early reviewers such as Kingsley and G.H. Lewes wrote that they were shocked by the "Yorkshire Roughness" of many of the characters, as well as the "vulgarity" in the characterization of the heroine Shirley, particularly in her improper relationship with her tutor and social inferior Louis. Lewes also disliked Shirley's independence and lack of propriety (Basch, 164). In this century, Shirley often ranks second to The Professor as the Charlotte Brontë novel that critics most disdain. Lord David Cecil's 1934 summation in Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation is worth quoting as a summary of the

faults critics most often attribute to the work:

> In Shirley Charlotte Brontë does attempt a more regular scheme. But the result of her effort is only to show her disastrous inability to sustain it. Not only is the story cumbered up with a number of minor characters like the Yorke family and Mrs. Pryor, who have no contribution to make to the main action; but that action is itself split into two independent parts. The first centres around Caroline, the second around Shirley; nor has the book any continuous theme of interest to which the two parts combine to form a single whole. Once fully launched on her surging tide of self-revelation, Charlotte Brontë is far above pausing to attend to so paltry a consideration as artistic unity. (115-116)

The claim that the novel lacks structural and artistic unity is a common one. Barbara Gareth and Lloyd Evans Gareth in The Scribner Companion to the Brontës state that Shirley "seems to lurch uncertainly from one subject to another, as if seeking a center" (258). These particular critics use a biographical approach (apparently agreeing with Cecil's claim that a central feature of the text is Brontë's "surging tide of self-revelation") to support allegations of disunity as well as the novel's "morbid emphasis on states of bodily health":

> Irritation in the reader might well be replaced by sympathy in the reflection that Emily (Charlotte's sister) was desperately ill during the time this novel was being written, and that she died when it was half-completed...Indeed, the uneasy disposition of themes that has been noticed may have been the result of a disturbance in Charlotte's imagination inflicted by Emily's death. (263)

Another critically-disparaged aspect of Brontë's "regular scheme" is her intention to provide realism in the form of "something real, cool and solid...something unromantic as Monday morning" (39), thus displacing any exaggerated expectations the reader may have. This is an operative principle noticeably lacking in her most famous novel, Jane Eyre, which contains large doses of gothic/romantic conventions as well as the "sentiment, and poetry, and reverie" (39) that Shirley disclaims. Perhaps this difference in tone and purpose is the reason that John Maynard has declared that "Brontë's half-hearted, somewhat backsliding conversion toward realism and away from passion, stimulus, and

melodrama provides the aesthetic context for the diffuse form and content of Shirley" (151). Similarly, in Their Proper Sphere: A Study of the Brontë Sisters as Early Victorian Female Novelists, an influential work published in 1966, Inga-Stina Ewbank claims that Brontë's adherence to realism is detrimental to the novel's artistic quality, as social realism is achieved at the expense of the psychological depth Brontë attains in her other works. "One cannot help feeling that in Shirley she betrays her own best gifts," says Ewbank (178).

The novel has been frequently cited for the supposed irrelevancy of some of its subsidiary characters. Most readers would disagree with Lord David Cecil that Mrs. Pryor is unnecessary to the plot: she is the principal embodiment of an important theme, that of the position of the governess in society, and, as the absent mother of one of the heroines, plays a crucial role in saving her daughter's life; but several critics agree about the redundancy of the Yorkes and other characters. Inga-Stina Ewbank makes such a claim:

> There is...a great deal of social satire, especially of the three unfortunate curates who, as far as the plot of the novel goes, are completely superfluous. And all around the major characters, there is a set of secondary ones -- like the radical Yorke family -- who, one feels, have each been developed for their own sake, rather than for any central purpose. (176)

Perhaps the most uniformly negative critical response to Shirley has been toward its conclusion, in which the independent-minded Shirley submits to the authority of her tutor Louis Moore and marries him, whilst the other heroine Caroline marries the other principal male character, Louis' brother Robert. Although Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Helene Mogen go to some lengths to explain why the novel should end thus, most critics simply dismiss this conclusion as a failure. Patricia Beer in Reader, I Married Him is one of many who find the final chapters tantamount to a betrayal of the reader. In the mind of this critic, Charlotte Brontë wastes her considerable potential:

> Here, we might be tempted to think, is a leader, a leader in the cause of feminism, and after reading Shirley with its clarion calls about the fatuousness of what women are expected to do and be and its glimpses of their possible scope, we might be completely convinced. But we should be finally disappointed...In the spirit and independence of its heroine the whole of Shirley demonstrates the potential of woman, but at the end the heroine dwindles into a tiresome neurotic who keeps putting off her wedding day for no good reason and who, when asked to shoulder any responsibility, simply says, "Go to Mr. Moore; ask Mr. Moore." (88)

Beer uses a biographical approach to discover a reason for what she believes to be a strange and disappointing thematic contradiction, and finds the answer in Charlotte's equally contradictory emotions toward her sister Emily, whom Charlotte claimed was the model for her characterization of Shirley. According to Beer's theory, Shirley is tamed because Charlotte wished Emily to be similarly subdued, disliking her sister's aggressiveness, social awkwardness, and the "terrifying intractibility" which caused her to refuse medical treatment during her final illness (108).

Another type of reaction is Jenni Calder's opinion that the ending is meant to conform to the comic conclusion demanded by romantic convention, but fails to convince the reader that it is in fact comic, largely due to Louis' "sententious and self-important" attitude and the lack of mental and emotional development on the part of the two heroines. Calder's final verdict is similar to Beer's in her statement that "Shirley ends with such easeful reconciliation that it almost amounts to a betrayal of all that is most striking in the novel" (63).

One of the few critics who views the novel negatively but recognizes the connection of the themes of labor unrest and the condition of women is Donald D. Stone in The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction. However, Stone claims that Brontë's association of these themes merely signifies her adherence to the power dynamic of mastery and submission, both in labor and personal relations:

> In Shirley, her one novel that touches on social problems, she criticizes the egoism and lack of sympathy of the Yorkshire

> millowners in the face of their workers' widespread misery, but she is unable to consider the possibility of meaningful reforms or changes because of her romantic image of a world of masterly leaders and devoted followers and because of her Protestant sense of the value of fortitude amidst suffering. (100-1)

Stone is similarly dissatisfied with the resolution (or irresolution) of Shirley's story, in which the novel "works toward a conclusion in which realistic questioning is met with fantasy solutions" (121). He also claims that this solution suggests "Brontë's inability to think of any fate for her independent co-heroine, with her masculine name and magisterial ways, other than to be consigned to the arms of that least interesting of all Brontë heroes" (124). Stone therefore concludes that Brontë's inadequate answer to the plight of England and women is "submission to dominating males" (125).

Now we know that such criticism is misleading when it is not inaccurate. A positive answer to critical negativity and the key to explaining this highly complex novel lies partially in its structure. Although overtly the work appears to be divided into two separate themes, the "social" (i.e. politics and dissatisfied workers as subject matter) and the "personal" (the plight of women), these seemingly disparate aspects are in reality closely bound together. As in many feminist works, political conditions reflect personal ones: the public tyrannies exercised over the workers by the ruling force, the industrialists, are echoed in the private tyranny of the patriarchal culture over women, who are forced into purely subordinate roles. The result is an unhappy state of gender apartheid, and it is in this light that Shirley can be viewed as an extended illustration of class-structured patriarchal society. The novel is in fact carefully structured, first in the juxtaposition of the male world, in which mercantile mentality and the desire for power are inherent traits, with the nature-centered female world, initially represented by Caroline Helstone. Caroline's dilemma, initiated by her rejection by Robert Moore and the industry-centered world he

represents, is in a larger sense symbolic of that sector of Victorian womanhood who found themselves without husbands or professions. Similarly, Caroline's question, "What is my place in the world?" is emblematic of what came to be known as the Woman Question. Later, the theme of the role of woman in society is principally illustrated by Shirley, whose independence and outspokenness frames a potential answer to the problem of the passive and purely domestic nature of traditional feminine gender roles.

The minor characters, far from being redundant, play important roles in representing facets of both the male and female worlds. The three overbearing curates, with their notions of women as servile beings and religion as a means to wield power and advance their own interests, are a portrait in miniature of some of the most deplorable aspects of patriarchal society. The hero (or rather, anti-hero) Robert Moore is the principal representative of mercantile mentality, in which woman's place is solely to promote his economic concerns. Helstone and Yorke, the tough-minded and unsympathetic Yorkshire "gentlemen," are prime examples of male power and what is popularly known as "muscular Christianity." And finally, Louis Moore, who is apparently an alternative to male authority with his dependent position and superior knowledge, also harbours ambitions to be an authority figure. The ambiguity with which he is characterized (he is at times feverish and helpless in his longing for Shirley, as well as domineering and calculating in his behaviour toward her) is often morally questionable but hardly, as Donald D. Stone claims, uninteresting. Aside from Caroline and Shirley, many of the female characters also reflect gender roles and divisions: for example, the "old maids" Hortense Moore, Miss Mann and Miss Ainley; the militant-minded wife and mother Mrs. Yorke; and her unconventional and promising young daughters Rose and Jessy.

The ending, although outwardly conforming to romantic convention with a double wedding, is emphatically not conventionally comic. Beneath the surface,

Brontë subtly inverts the traditional romance plot, and what appears to be a fairytale ending is intentionally an unfavourable situation. By means of the negative imagery connected with marriage and an emphasis on the unpleasant power dynamic of male mastery and female submission, Brontë adheres to her statement that the novel is "as unromantic as Monday morning."

CHAPTER I: CAROLINE AND HER ENVIRONMENT

Although Shirley is not formally divided into volumes, it can be separated into three distinct parts according to its thematic shifts. The first part, which I will examine in this chapter, covers Chapters One through Ten and is basically an overview of the inhabitants and social structure of the community of Briarfield, much of which is seen through the eyes of one of the co-heroines, Caroline. As I showed in my introduction, Shirley is Brontë's novel of social protest, in which she examines the conflicts and differences between various socio-economic groups within the community. Judging by the author's attitude, she appears to be taking a cue from the famous speech in Benjamin Disraeli's influential 1845 novel Sybil, or The Two Nations, a work which, like Shirley, examines a social phenomenon, namely, two utterly different ways of life (not to mention standards of living) within a single country, a division which this dialogue between two of Disraeli's characters clearly defines:

> "Well, society may be in its infancy," said Egremont slightly smiling; "but, say what you like, our Queen reigns over the greatest nation that ever existed."
>
> "Which nation?" asked the younger stranger, "for she reigns over two. Yes, two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws."
>
> "You speak of --" said Egremont, hesitatingly.
>
> "THE RICH AND THE POOR." (96)

In her examination of the condition of women, Brontë takes the idea of class disparity a step further to include gender divisions. Women, Brontë posits, are trapped in much the same conditions as the laboring classes: that is to say, both are largely disregarded and repressed by a combination of the traditional patriarchal structure and the new economic mentality which arrived at the onset of the

Industrial Revolution. Character by character, scene by scene, Brontë illustrates the construction of the world of the powerful patriarchy and of the industrialists, sectors which are diametrically opposed to those of the poverty-stricken, powerless women on the one hand, and the working classes on the other. Since the first third of the novel is structured in this way, I have chosen to examine the first ten chapters in chronological order as a means of drawing attention to the author's methods of developing reader awareness of the disparities between these two worlds, which, like Disraeli's "two nations," exist within the same community, but which are otherwise entirely separate spheres which only rarely interconnect, and then almost always abrasively.

It may seem peculiar that a novel largely concerned with the Woman Question should open with a chapter about three obnoxious curates, all of whom are singularly useless except at eating prodigious amounts of other people's food and arguing about trivialities. In regard to the theme of the social condition of England, the opening is entirely valid: the first chapter heading, "Levitical," is obviously ironical, for if Messrs. Donne, Malone and Sweeting are modern representatives of the biblical priests, the Levites, it is small wonder that England is in a sorry state. This beginning is also germane to the theme of female oppression, as Brontë's construction of the hard, brawling, male-centered world of the first four chapters stands in opposition to the thoughtful, nurturing, nature-centered world embodied by Caroline and Shirley. Not surprisingly, this feminine world is one that is continually disregarded by men.

To quote Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who study the connection between hunger imagery and the female condition in detail, "Brontë begins so unappetizing a first course because she wants to consider why the curates' feast initiates her heroines' fasts" (374). As Gilbert and Gubar have also noted, this is a scene which is "distinctively male," and which links two types of consumption,

literally that of food, and metaphorically of the male consumption of woman (373). The curates eat everything Mr. Donne's long-suffering landlady (whose name, Mrs. Gale, suggests violence; appropriately, the names of the other curates' landladies are "Hogg" and "Whipp," thus reflecting the personalities of their tenants) can offer them, all the while complaining about the quality of the meal, and exhorting their relectant attendant to "Cut it, woman" (42). This scene is also one that sets a pattern for the gender antagonism intrinsic to the novel. Men and women are divided, their behaviour completely opposed: the men in the scene are noisy and demanding, the woman angry but silent, denoting her unexpressed rage, a condition which Caroline's dilemma illustrates at length. She is referred to not by name, but simply as "woman," indicating that the curates view women as a species indistinguishable from one another and only of value for their services to men. In effect, the three successfully enact the nullification of the female identity. Significantly, the food these men eat is consumed at the expense not only of the landlady but also of her six-year-old son, whose deprivation prefigures that of the equally helpless child laborers with insufficient dinner baskets, whose labor is consumed by the power figures at the mill, Robert Moore and Joe Scott. This scene is also symptomatic of the fixed condition of women and the working classes, namely, a permanent state of anger and emotional and physical hunger. Young Abraham's outraged cries are only the first of many heard throughout the novel.

Chapter Two begins with a symbolic rendering of the antagonism between the male and female spheres. Just as he behaved insultingly toward the landlady Mrs. Gale, indeed as he does toward all women, Malone disregards nature -- in this text a female-identified element -- except to trample over it on his way to Robert Moore's mill. The industry-centered world is also set in opposition to nature as the Stilbro' ironworks throw a "lurid shimmer" of fire onto a dark sky. Since the glow disturbs the "black-blue serenity" of the atmosphere, this image suggests the

disruption of nature by powerful male-centered industrial forces. The incompatibility of male and female principles is also in evidence in the scenes in Robert Moore's counting-house. This building can be designated a male space, utterly lacking in feminine attributes, and where Moore prefers to isolate himself rather than living in the house his sister keeps for him. Physically, it is plain and comfortless, filled with little more than accoutrements of Moore's cloth industry, "plans for building, for gardening, designs of machinery" (58). When women are mentioned in the conversation between Moore and Malone, it is impatiently and with contempt. Women, Moore explains, have no place in his impersonal business world:

> As if there was nothing to be done in life but to "pay attention," as they say, to some young lady, and then to go to church with her, and then to start on a bridal tour, and then to run through a round of visits, and then, I suppose, to be "having a family"...I believe women talk and think only of these things, and they naturally fancy men's minds similarly occupied. (57-8)

His indifferent, condescending attitude toward the private female sphere becomes understandable as the narrator explains that he is the offspring of parents who married solely to advance their mercantile interests. To them, as to him, love and love-making are a mere "figment," having nothing to do with the "real, cool, and solid" world of industry and finance. The real business of life is making money, and the real enjoyment of it lies in making war. Significantly, the only real enthusiasm Moore displays throughout this chapter is for hunting down and prosecuting the frame-breakers who destroy his machinery because it has made them redundant.

In a larger sense, Moore represents what Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English in For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women term "Economic Man," the human byproduct of the Industrial Revolution. He is not only a community upstart, who has only lived in Briarfield for two years, but is unapologizingly only half English. In a negative sense, his notion of "radical reform"

is improving mill production methods as quickly as possible, without considering the laborers who will be put out of work. His creed, "Forward," is an ideal of progress in only the most narrow, isolated sense, designed solely to benefit himself. The callousness he consistently displays toward the working-class represents the near-irreconcilable disparity in the positions of employers and workers in the early nineteenth-century as "impersonal economic relationships" common to this new order prevail (Ehrenreich and English, 17). Like the curates, he also consumes a marginalized sector, while literally depriving them of nourishment because they cannot get work.

The connection between the male sphere and warrior mentality is extended in the introduction of the "clerical Cossack" Mr. Helstone, whose misfortune is that "he had missed his vocation: he should have been a soldier, and circumstances had made him a priest" (67-8). Accordingly, like Moore, he demonstrates a thorough enjoyment of his adventure with the frame-breakers, including the knowledge that he might well be killed. Moreover, as a respected clergyman and authority figure he has the law on his side, a status which enables him to persecute the frame-breakers vicariously in the guise of "duty", as he enthusiastically admits:

> It always agrees with me to be doing my duty; and in this case my duty is a thorough pleasure. To hunt down vermin is a noble occupation,--fit for an Archbishop. (73)

After reading such a remark, one might reflect that it is unsurprising that ecclesiastical history has been marked by violent persecutions of minority groups. One might also say that in this case, the rebellious frame-breakers who try to obstruct industrial progress are in the minds of Helstone and his associates modern-day equivalents of medieval heretics. No hint of the traditional Christian attributes of love and charity enter into Helstone's conscicusness, and religious doctrine is useful to him only for allegorical references during political arguments. In this sense, he resembles the foolish curates: his status is higher and his authority

greater, but he is no more sensitive or compassionate.

Although Hiram Yorke is diametrically opposed to Helstone on many points (most notably in his distrust of parsons and greater sympathy toward the working classes), his personality complements that of the "Cossack" to the extent that the two combine to form the novel's principal figureheads of patriarchal authority. Although more intellectually refined than Helstone, Yorke is equally domineering and inflexible. Implicitly, he also enacts patriarchal suppression of literature and female expression, appreciating music and art, but finding much of the literature he reads unacceptable because he fails to understand poetic mentality. Significantly, in a later chapter, he is described sitting with a book among his medallions of Shakespeare and of Milton (whom Bronte heavily criticizes for his misreading of the female mentality, 315), thus connecting him with patriarchal canonical literature, from which women are of course excluded. This prohibition of female artistic expression is a trait in patriarchal culture which is perhaps one of the reasons why the potential poet Shirley expresses her visions inwardly, but never exteriorizes them to create literature. Men like Yorke are too formidable an obstacle.

As it happens, Yorke's essential dislike of Helstone is founded not on political differences, but because of an earlier rivalry for the hand of the woman Helstone eventually married. With the story of Mary Cave, the novel plunges into the most painful aspects of gender apartheid. Mary's surname, Cave, suggests her buried inner self, dissociated from others, especially her husband. Certainly she is an enigma to him. Because she is "stillness personified" and looks like a "monumental angel," Helstone dehumanizes her and therefore fails to discern that she has emotional needs:

> He thought, so long as a woman was silent, nothing ailed her, and she wanted nothing. If she did not complain of solitude, solitude, however continued, could not be irksome to her. If she did not talk and put herself forward, express a partiality for this, an aversion to that, she had no partialities or aversions, and it was useless to consult her tastes. He made no pretence of comprehending women, or comparing

> them with men: they were a different, probably a very inferior order of existence; a wife could not be her husband's companion, much less his confidant, much less his stay. (82)

Like his curates, Helstone disregards feminine identity, in this case silencing his wife to the extent that she is ultimately destroyed. Given his essential dislike of women and inability to understand them, one is tempted to ask why Mary Cave married him, and why he married at all. The answer to the first question is an implicit criticism of the traditional power dynamic of male dominance and female submission. Mary Cave prefers Helstone's flint-like manner to Yorke's "absorbing passion" and the "humble reverence" displayed by her other suitors principally because she is unable to subdue him:

> He saw her more as she really was than the rest did; he was, consequently, more master of her and himself. (82)

His supposed knowledge of her is in reality nonexistent, although his power over her as her husband is all too real. In this sense, Mary Cave functions as a precursor to Shirley, who marries the domineering Louis because he is able to master her. Since Mary Cave undergoes emotional and finally physical death because of her adherence to ingrained notions of traditional power relations between the sexes, one is left at the end of the novel questioning whether Shirley will suffer a similar fate.

Perhaps the reason Helstone married lies in the tendency of the men in this novel to view women as property. In this light, Mary Cave is of value to him because she is beautiful and sought-after by other men, a prize he wins against all comers. Psychologically, she satisfies his proprietal needs, particularly because of her Madonna-like qualities in an era when purity was a highly-valued trait in women. This emphasis on woman as possession was, wrote the reformer Edward Carpenter in 1896, due to the importance placed on private property. According to Carpenter, this type of materialism had "turned Woman more and more -- especially of course among the possessing classes -- into an emblem of possession -- a mere doll, an empty idol, a brag of a man's exclusive right in the sex" (Trudgill, 16). This

argument bears weight in relation to Shirley because Mary Cave literally becomes the object her husband has always considered her. After her gradual decline (which Helstone barely notices) and death, Brontë describes her as a "still beautiful-featured mould of clay," and therefore, as in Carpenter's description, doll-like and empty, a discarded nonentity.

Although Chapter 5 begins with an exclusively male scene -- Robert and his hard-headed foreman Joe Scott at work in the mill -- there is a shift in emphasis from the masculine to the feminine in Robert's scenes with his sister Hortense, who is one of several potential role models for Caroline. Hortense, as her unlovely name might suggest, is one of the novel's "old maids" as well as the epitome of the domestic paragon. In this novel, household perfection is not necessarily an attractive quality, for Hortense is obsessed with propriety and domestic trivia to the point of ridiculousness. Several of the comic highlights in the novel belong to her monologues in which she staunchly defends her insistence upon clinging to Belgian clothes and customs, despite the laughter she elicits from the rest of the community. Moreover, she upholds patriarchal principles: for example, she adheres to the notion of class distinction in her objection to the people of Briarfield because they do not give her the respect she believes is due to her family. Her relationship to Robert can be viewed as a precursor to that of Madame Beck to Monsieur Paul in Bronte's last novel, Villette, in that Hortense continually defers to male authority despite her own strong character and will. Her unquestioning subservience to men is also in evidence in her belief that her brother's judgement is infallible. However, her most objectionable trait is her insistence upon educating Caroline to be submissive and emotionally repressed: in other words, exactly like herself, as if her frustrated strength of character can find an outlet only by oppressing others. Judging by Hortense's description of Caroline, the reader guesses at once that the girl is discontented and longs for a life of passion and feeling, qualities Hortense

disapproves of and intends to dispel:

> I will give her a system, a method of thought, a set of opinions; I will give her the perfect control and guidance of her feelings. (96)

Since this "perfect control" consists in trying to eradicate Caroline's natural spirits and opinions (represented partly by Hortense's attempt to persuade the girl to wear the same unnecessarily restrictive clothing as herself), it is unsurprising that Caroline quickly rejects her example.

The actual "education" Hortense provides Caroline with is made to sound dull in the extreme, consisting of such dry and superficial activities as exercises in French grammar and endless sewing. Needlework is in fact a motif in the novel, designed to symbolize the boredom and futility inherent in the lives of women. Hortense's obsession with useless detail is never more in evidence than in her insistence that the darning of holes in stockings is "one of the first duties of woman" (107) and that it is by no means a waste of time for Caroline to spend two years mending a hopelessly decrepit pair of hose. It is therefore understandable that Caroline continually indulges in romantic daydreams, for she is offered nothing more substantial to contemplate.

In Chapters Five and Six, Caroline is viewed mainly in relation to the object of her fantasies, Robert, her manner toward him being a comment on the "cult of domesticity" as well as the nurturing roles women were expected to play. Together, she and Robert embody the polarities inherent in male/female relationships: he represents masculine mercantilism, and she feminine nurturance and a potential haven from the competitiveness of the business world. According to sociological accounts of Victorian life, the allotment of roles to men as providers and women as nurturing homemakers was common. Françoise Basch (with some quotations from the nineteenth-century moralist Mrs. Ellis) in Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel explains this bifurcation:

> The idealization of the wife as inspirer of humanity belonged with the Victorian conception of the Home and its meaning within the contemporary system of values. The home, a feminine attribute as it were, the "outermost garment of her soul," which surrounds the wife worthy of the name wherever she may be found, is like a temple of purity, a haven of peace in a hostile and impure world. It falls to the man, the active ingredient, to take risks outside the sanctuary or bastion and to pit himself against his peers in a bitter struggle that often leaves him wounded, weakened, disenchanted ... The warrior of modern times, daily seeking comfort and inspiration from his wife, was none other than "the man of business in the present day," obsessed by the acquisition of wealth. "The Moloch of this world" which devoured him, through ruthless competition engendering envy and hate, was the commercialism and capitalism of the nineteenth century. It was for the middle class industrialist and businessman impelled by the "economic motive" that the wife played the double role of agent of peace and "second conscience." Her mission was to help him resist the "snares of the world around him, and temptation." (7-8)

Caroline and Robert demonstrate antithetical attitudes congruent with this description of the division between the sexes. Robert is admittedly self-centered, claiming that "the poor ought to have no large sympathies; it is their duty to be narrow" (99); moreover, he concedes that fear of poverty has made him and other industrialists in his position "necessarily selfish, contracted, grovelling, anxious" (99). Conversely, Caroline naively advocates selflessness without considering her own self-fulfillment. Her ambition, she tells Robert, is to become an apprentice in his cloth trade to aid him in becoming rich, not realizing that this wish is complicitous in the mercantile mentality which causes him to reject her because of her lack of money. She also tries to bolster his ego by attempting to persuade him that he is better than he believes, valorizing him to the extent of identifying him with Shakespeare's tragic hero Coriolanus. She then strives to play another traditional female role in relation to him, that of wise counsellor and moral advisor, insisting that he read Coriolanus to learn the folly of being proud to his laborers; thus she endeavours to remove his self-imposed alienation from the community and convince him of the inadvisability of his adherence to the "impersonal economic relationships" Ehrenreich and English describe. In both instances, her efforts to

instill humanist morality in Robert are unmitigated failures, despite her accurate reading of his character and the sound advice she offers him. He rejects her idealized vision of him, advising her to "think meanly of me...Men, in general, are a sort of scum, very different to anything of which you have an idea; I make no pretension to be better than my fellows" (111). His self-directed cynicism is somewhat exaggerated, for as Caroline perceives and he later admits, there is a division in his subjective self, with an idealistic side to his personality which he usually suppresses:

> But I find in myself, Lina, two natures; one for the world and business, and one for home and leisure. Gerard Moore is a hard dog, brought up to mill and market: the person you call your cousin Robert is sometimes a dreamer, who lives elsewhere than in Cloth-hall and counting-house. (258)

Likewise, her interpretation of Coriolanus in relation to him is a valid one: the comparison of him to a classic literary character may be a valorization, but his behaviour bears a marked resemblance to Coriolanus' snobbery and pride, and in the explosive labor situation in which he is enmeshed, his attitude invites the same type of subversive violence from his enemies found in Shakespeare's play. This scene is designed to show how the company of women awakes and refines moral sensibility, but since Robert merely ignores Caroline, her potential as a moral force is wasted.

There are a number of dominant themes in Chapters Seven and Eight related to the theme of the gulf between the male and female worlds. The first is the juxtaposition of the fictions Caroline authors with the disappointing and mundane reality she actually encounters. Again, hunger imagery denotes emotional deprivation: Caroline's "illusive, void dreams" of her future life (in this case, as Robert's wife) are said by the narrator to be common to one of her extreme youth and inexperience, and in the unlikely event that "the visions we see at eighteen years" (122) become reality, "we think to hunger and thirst no more" (121). Gazing

at her reflection in the mirror and dreaming of love for Robert which she believes reciprocated, Caroline resembles the isolated, fatally romantic heroine of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," a figure common in Victorian literature. According to Jennifer Gribble in The Lady of Shalott in the Victorian Novel, this female stereotype is defined as

> A complex of literary and social conventions and attitudes that form the characteristic subject and shape of the novel of Tennyson's contemporaries. The self-enclosed protagonist, seeing the world mirrored by the consciousness, conscious above all of individual needs and wants, is not only the characteristic protagonist of the Victorian novel, but an image of its very form. (5)

This figure is also of particular relevance to studies of characterization in Charlotte Brontë's novels:

> Charlotte Brontë's heroines restlessly tread out their confines, their imagination at its weaving work, creating pictures of a compensating "reality." (5)

Certainly, Caroline matches Gribble's description of the "self-enclosed protagonist," her mirror emblematic of her inner wish for rescue by love and emotional fulfillment (specifically by Robert, but also, as she later reveals, by her absent mother) from the oppressive and emotionally cold environment in which she lives with her uncle. The room in which she weaves her fictions is reminiscent of the "Four grey walls, and four grey towers" (389) in which the Lady of Shalott is imprisoned, signifying confinement, but also a female "inner space," separated from the hard, often vicious male world by the female imagination creating its own vastly different reality. In this space, Caroline can indulge in imaginings which allow her mentally to escape -- at least for a time -- from the narrow boundaries society imposes on her life. Unfortunately, her construction of her future life with "Happiness and Robert" are merely naive dreams, totally at odds with the reality of Robert's mercantilism which to him makes a union with her, a woman without a fortune, unthinkable.

The ambiguity of her imaginings is suggested by the image of her as a mermaid, despite her aspirations to become a Victorian angel-woman, a binary opposition defined by Nina Auerbach in Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth:

> Angels were thought to be meekly self-sacrificial by nature: in this cautiously diluted form, they were pious emblems of a good woman's submergence in her family. Mermaids, on the other hand, submerge themselves not to negate their power, but to conceal it. (9)

Caroline's particular power is the ability to transcend her surroundings by means of the false hope with which she is provided by her imagination. Therefore, this negative image of her as mermaid calls into question the validity of her fantasies of marital bliss and domestic felicity with someone usually associated with emotional coldness and stone imagery. Her internal monologue in front of the mirror, in which she exuberantly expresses her love for her cousin and projects their marriage and her future role as supportive wife seems calculated to elicit pity from the reader for her imperception of the truth and a prescient foreshadowing of her future sufferings when denied her wishes rather than admiration for her creative abilities. Given his unchivalrous disregard for the female sex, Robert is an unlikely "loyal knight and true" (391) and one strongly suspects that Caroline is likely to remain imprisoned in an emotional state akin to the Lady of Shalott's isolation. Moreover, it is highly questionable that a marriage between the two would be any improvement over Caroline's single state, for it is doubtful whether Robert is emotionally capable (at least at this point in the narrative) of reciprocating the affection and nurturance she lavishes on him, particularly as he dismisses his attraction to her as "weakness...the frenzy is quite temporary" (120).

Unsurprisingly, Caroline's fictions are quickly and painfully undermined, for Robert has nothing to offer her but a stony denial of feeling, although, as she notes during one of her typical effusions about him, he is a vast improvement over the

other men of her acquaintance, a factor which is the probable reason for her attraction to him:

> "He has not his peer," she thought; "he is as handsome as he is intelligent. What a keen eye he has! What clearly cut, spirited features -- thin and serious, but graceful! I do like his face -- I do like his aspect -- I do like him so much! Better than any of those shuffling curates, for instance, -- better than anybody: bonnie Robert!"(127)

Despite the accuracy of her assessment of his superiority to the curates, her youthful imperception is again obvious, for the grasping, self-centered Robert has little more affection to offer her than her uncle Helstone. The disparity between her vision and the reality of her situation is expressed through imagery: Robert is "a tall fact, and no fiction" (127) and greets her only because he is obligated by politeness to do so. Caroline's cruel disappointment gives rise to an examination both of the inequality inherent in male/female relationships and the silencing of women. Her position as a "lover feminine" has often been commented on by critics, and is one of the novel's most perceptive comments on the female condition. As a "lover feminine," she is, unlike the "lover masculine," unable to speak or question because of the socially-ingrained notion that women "ask no questions; utter no remonstrances" (128) to men. Like her aunt Mary Cave before her, she must withdraw into self-enclosure and by no means ask for the emotional sustenance she is denied. Starvation and stone imagery play a prominent role in this section:

> You expected bread, and you have got a stone; break your teeth on it, and don't shriek because the nerves are martyrized: do not doubt that your mental stomach -- if you have such a thing -- is as strong as an ostrich's -- the stone will digest. (128)

As Gilbert and Gubar have noted, Caroline's surname, Hel/stone, is entirely appropriate (378), for swallowing this particular emotional stone is a difficult task in a society in which marriage and domestic perfection are the ultimate (indeed the only) goals to which women are expected to aspire. Caroline has been rejected, which means not only that she has been denied emotional nourishment, but that she

has experienced the ultimate female failure, namely, the inability to ensnare a husband.

Predictably, the other male in her life, her uncle, is useless to her, and indeed, often detrimental to her emotional development. In relation to Caroline, Mr. Helstone plays the role common to the Victorian governing classes, that of the absent paterfamilias. Although uncle and niece are often in close physical proximity, she is to him a nonexistent entity, a duty to be tolerated but largely ignored. According to David Roberts, the most common characteristics of the paterfamilias figure are "remoteness, sovereignity, and benevolence" (59). Helstone possesses all of the above-named attributes, although the little benevolence he shows toward his niece is remote and condescending in nature. Aside from withholding affection, he has also entirely neglected her education, as evidenced by his uninterested inquiry about her day with Hortense:

> "And have you learnt your lessons?"
> "Yes."
> "And made a shirt?"
> "Only part of one."
> "Well, that will do: stick to the needle -- learn shirt-making and gown-making, and pie-crust-making, and you'll be a clever woman some day. Go to bed now: I'm busy with a pamphlet here." (122)

Symbolically, he condemns her to a life of confinement and boredom by insisting that she "stick to the needle," an image which suggests intolerable futility in a text in which sewing is redolent of domestic slavery. By insisting she leave him to write his pamphlet (which he does not trouble to describe to her), he also excludes her from the world of intellectualism, which presumably, he considers fit only for an elite few, which naturally do not include women.

The emotional damage and intellectual starvation to which he subjects her are also in evidence in his attempt to indoctrinate her into his misogynistic mode of thought during their discussion about marriage, and in his efforts to deny her knowledge of her personal history. Caroline reveals an inquisitive if naive

intelligence, and also demonstrates a warm, sympathetic nature very much at odds with her uncle's cynicism, although her idealistic views are buoyed by unrealistic hopes of a union with Robert, and her speech marked by sentimental imagery in which flowers, birds building nests, and church bells figure prominently. She displays tenacity in resisting Helstone's conviction that marriage is "pure folly...a yokefellow is not a companion; he or she is a fellow-sufferer" (124), and an equal insistence upon discovering her own history and that of her absent mother, subjects consistently ignored by her uncle. Again, the theme of gender apartheid comes into play. He silences her questions about his own marriage by terming them "stupid and babyish" (125), and regards those about private life as an annoyance, principally because they interrupt such male-centered activities as his perusal of newspaper war bulletins. His insensitivity and indifference to her are evident in his reply to her inquiries about the whereabouts of her mother that she "thinks nothing of you" (127), and then in the harshness of his order to leave him. However, one is left with the suspicion that Helstone's anti-marriage stance is not without some degree of validity, for by all accounts, Caroline's own father was drunken, cruel, and neglectful, and as Caroline herself realizes, "If my mother suffered what I suffered when I was with papa, she must have had a dreadful life" (126). Therefore, Caroline's idealism is again undercut by painful reality.

Chapter Seven, "The Curates at Tea," is an important section for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the examination of social niceties in the community of Briarfield. In the scenes of the tea party at Mr. Helstone's vicarage, it becomes evident that behind the facade of neighborly gentility, there lies an irreconcilable division between the sexes as well as lack of sympathy and understanding between women. The women at the party, Mrs. Sykes, "a tall bilious gentlewoman" (132) and her "showy trio" of daughters represent a standard of propriety which the nervous and diffident Caroline cannot hope to emulate:

> In English country ladies there is this point to be remarked. Whether young or old, pretty or plain, dull or sprightly, they all (or almost all) have a certain expression stamped on their features, which seems to say, "I know -- I do not boast of it -- but I know that I am the standard of what is proper; let every one therefore whom I approach or who approaches me, keep a sharp look-out, for wherein they differ from me -- be the same in dress, manner, opinion, principle, or practice -- therein they are wrong." (132)

Caroline differs from them in her isolation and lack of social graces; therefore, in their presence, she feels acutely her "ignorance and incompetency" (133).

At a certain level, men and women manage to interconnect, but mainly in matters of religion, and always negatively. Judging by their conversation about ministers and bible meetings, Mrs. Sykes and her daughters have an exaggerated reverence for clergymen, and are only induced to stay to tea because the curates are present. Caroline, with her first-hand knowledge of the true nature of her uncles and the curates, is unable to share their enthusiasm. However, like them, she is obliged to contribute to the church "Jew-basket," although she again lacks their zeal for the project. Aside from functioning as a comic vignette, this unbearably tedious ritual represents female complicity in patriarchal practices in the guise of the charitable works women were expected to perform. The sewing motif is again prominent in the description of the dullness of the needlework done by the women in order to sell "a monster collection of pincushions, needle-books, card-racks, work-bags, articles of infant-wear, etc., etc., etc." (134) at exhorbitant prices. The purpose of this labor is to aid in "the conversion of the Jews, the seeking up of the ten missing tribes, or...the regeneration of the interesting coloured population of the globe" (134). In other words, the basket is a symbol of the imposition of imperialism and patriarchal religion on marginalized sectors, and is meant by Brontë to call into question the efficacy of female "good works." By being morally obligated to contribute to the basket, often against their will ("feebler souls" are said to prefer to "see the prince of darkness himself at their door any morning, than that phantom-basket") (134-5), women are oppressed in much the same way as the imperially-

dominated races which the patriarchy attempts to convert.

In the scenes at the party itself, there is a marked emphasis on the relationship between the sexes and the workings of the marriage market. Helstone exercises his benevolent qualities by charming the Misses Sykes, young women who suit him because they are "as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible" (138). Helstone consistently attributes child-like status to women, a common attitude as the following quotation by Lord Chesterfield illustrates:

> Women, then are only children of a larger growth. A man of sense only trifles with them, plays with them, humours and flatters them, as he does with a sprightly, forward child. (Trudgill, 67)

Similarly, Helstone despises the female character and intellect, although he enjoys using women, particularly the vain and weak-minded Hannah Sykes, as playthings: appropriately, when inclined to propose to Hannah, he is said to feel "tempted to *commit* matrimony" (138, my italics), thus potentially transforming the girl from "a bright, admired butterfly" to "a sordid, trampled worm" (139). Despite the disparity in their ages and Helstone's "bent-leather heart," Hannah's parents approve of him as a prospective husband for their daughter, partially because of his highly respectable profession, but mostly because of the property and money they believe him to possess. Similarly, Malone, mistakenly believing that Caroline will be Helstone's heiress, unsuccessfully tries to ingratiate himself with her; the barrier between them is represented by the sofa cushions he nervously erects between them, signifying the essential lack of communication and compatibility between the sexes, even in such an intimate matter as courtship.

Caroline's reaction to an extended period of "listening to nothing, and gazing on vacancy" (142) is again to retreat into self-enclosure. She enters into a lethargic and nearly unconscious state, largely to escape a social situation in which she is a misfit. Again, she closely resembles the Lady of Shalott figure, waiting for rescue

from isolation in the form of Robert, who eventually makes an appearance, but only to disappoint her when she repeats her attempt to play the traditional female role of moral guide and is again disregarded. Knowing the character of the Yorkshire people Robert must deal with, she issues another warning to him not to antagonize the laborers, using stone imagery to describe the tenacity of the inhabitants of Yorkshire when seeking revenge:

> You do not know how the people of this country bear malice: it is the boast of some of them that they can keep a stone in their pocket seven years, turn it at the end of that time, keep it seven years longer, and hurl it, and hit their mark "at last." (143-4)

Unwisely, Robert laughs and ignores her advice. Gilbert and Gubar provide an excellent summary of Caroline's true meaning and the inevitability of Robert's fate as victim of a near-fatal assassination attempt, intertwining the themes of the repression of women with that of the oppression of workers:

> The man who offers stones instead of bread in return for the woman's love will receive as his punishment the rocks and stones cast by the other victims of his competitive egotism, the workers. (379)

Robert's rejection of Caroline is, however, considerably more gentle than his behaviour throughout Chapter Eight, in which Caroline's heroic vision of him is completely deflated. He appears in this section to be much like Helstone, first as the two of them enjoy the weakness of the drunken millowner Mr. Sykes with undisguised glee:

> Moore looked as if he should have liked to fool him <Sykes> to the top of his bent. What would a certain young kinswoman of his have said, could she have seen her dear, good, great Robert -- her Coriolanus -- just now? Would she have acknowledged in that mischievous sardonic visage the same face to which she had looked up with such love, which had bent over her with such gentleness last night? (151)

This "other," harder (one is tempted to say "stony") aspect of Robert manifests itself increasingly throughout this chapter. His answer to the two leaders of the protest delegation who arrive at the mill, Moses Barraclough and Noah o' Tim's, is to have

Barraclough unceremoniously arrested as one of the frame-breakers, despite the animosity this act causes among Barraclough's followers. Granted, it is difficult to sympathize with either Moses or Noah, for there is deliberate irony in their biblical names and supposed religious fanaticism: as Robert truthfully points out, they hypocritically cause labor unrest for their own gain, and not by reason of sympathy for the poor. However, Robert's treatment of the honest, impoverished laborer William Farren is indicative of serious flaws in his own behaviour, namely, inflexibility and lack of compassion. Whilst Barraclough insists that Robert "go without further protractions straight home to where you belong" (154), the reasonable Farren merely requests that he implement his industrial changes more slowly in order to put less people out of work. Robert is impenetrable to his pleas, remaining isolated and "only myself," refusing to ally himself with his own class, with whom he competes in business, or to take responsibility for the condition of the lower classes. Interestingly, his treatment and dismissal of Farren echo Helstone's earlier harshness toward Caroline, again linking women and the working classes as disregarded, marginalized sectors.

This chapter does much to integrate the theme of female oppression with that of the difficulties faced by the working classes. A main example of the similarities between the two sectors is Farren's speech in which he addresses the problem of poverty and unemployment, insisting that the lot of the workers be improved:

> Invention may be all right, but I know it isn't right for poor folks to starve. Them that governs mun find a way to help us: they mun mak' fresh orderations. Ye'll say that's hard to do: -- so mich louder mun we shout out then, for so much slacker will t'Parliament-men be to set on to a tough job. (157)

Although ostensibly addressed to Robert, this remonstrance is a thinly-disguised authorial plea to the ruling powers. It is also directly comparable to Caroline's later meditations, appropriately made as she is engaged in the oppressive female activity

of sewing. Like Farren's speech, her thoughts read like a parliamentary address, and are again an obvious authorial comment, in this instance an exhortation to the "Men of England" to allow women more interesting and useful occupations (378-9). Through this juxtaposition, it becomes evident that both laborers and women -- especially "old maids" with neither husbands nor occupations -- share the same desolate experience of redundancy and marginalization.

As noted in the introduction, the portrait of the Yorke family in Chapter Nine, "Briarmains," has often been cited as an example of Charlotte Brontë's overuse of material extraneous to the narrative as well as her inability to integrate the novel's themes and plot elements. It is fairly easy to see why past critics have viewed this section as unnecessary, for none of the family except Mr. Yorke has much function within the narrative: his wife crops up to make cynical comments at various intervals; the daughters Rose and Jessy appear in only two chapters; and of the three sons, only Martin does anything to advance the plot. The second critical approach to this chapter is to assess it in "autobiographical" terms as Brontë's tribute to her friends the Taylor family. This approach too possesses some validity, as the Yorkes are known to have been based directly on members of the Taylor family and events in their lives: according to Brontë's biographer Winifred Gérin, Mrs. Taylor, like Mrs. Yorke, was "not particularly loved by her daughters, whose life she oppressed with her gloom and tyranny" (71); Mary Taylor, like Rose, boldly emigrated; and Martha Taylor shared Jessy's fate of dying young on foreign soil. However, upon closer examination, this chapter is neither extraneous nor a sentimental remembrance, but is crucial for thematic reasons, since the family represents the workings of a patriarchal society, and the daughters suggest possibilities for female emancipation from oppression.

Like much of the rest of the novel, this section is structured on the antithetical lines of the female versus the male world, although again, the women, in

this case the mother and her daughters, have little sympathy with each other. Mrs. Yorke, the family's grim matriarch, bears an unmistakable resemblance to Hortense Moore. Like Hortense, Mrs. Yorke centers her life on domestic perfection, and insists that everyone around her, especially her daughters, conform to her standards. Rose's relationship with her mother closely replicates that of Hortense and Caroline, including the younger woman's quiet rebellion:

> Rose is a still, sometimes a stubborn girl now: her mother wants to make of her such a woman as she is herself, -- a woman of dark and dreary duties, -- and Rose has a mind full-set, thick-sown with the germs of ideas her mother never knew. (167)

A hybrid of the best qualities of her parents -- her father's intellect and her mother's strength, with the addition of a spirit of her own -- Rose is associated with fertile plant imagery, not only in the name Brontë gives her, but in the description of her blooming cheeks and "thick-sown" mind. She is quiet, but unlike Caroline, not silenced, despite the best efforts of her mother. She is apparently destined for spinsterhood (unlike Jessy, "the manner to attract will not be hers," 173), but with a potential lacking in Caroline or the "old maids" described in the next chapter, namely, the initiative to leave England and its patriarchal oppression. In Chapter 23, she compares her life with Caroline's and comes to the conclusion that the older girl's life is no better than metaphorical live burial, as to Rose, change is a necessary condition of happiness and stagnation akin to death. Moreover, Rose lacks Caroline's tendency to self-pity and hopelessness. There is a clear affinity between the two in that they both live in harsh, unsympathetic surroundings, Caroline at *Briar*field and Rose at *Briar*mains, but Rose possesses the ability to turn what seem to Caroline misfortunes into advantages. Whereas Caroline weeps over her sewing and appears to consider it emblematic of her loneliness and lack of purpose in life, Rose looks upon domestic accomplishments as valuable acquisitions to be turned to her own use, and, while she dislikes household occupations, she neither sees herself

as an oppressed victim nor her present condition of life as permanent. However, she also believes strongly that it is nothing less than a sin to lead a purely domestic existence, punning on the original biblical meaning of the word "talent" as money and revising it in its modern context to mean ability in order to create a feminist version of scriptural teachings, much as Shirley revises traditionally negative visions of Eve later in the novel:

> Mother, the Lord who gave us each of our talents will come home some day, and will demand from all an account. The tea-pot, the old stocking-foot, the linen rag, the willow-pattern tureen, will yield up their barren deposit in many a house: suffer your daughters, at least, to put their money to the exchangers, that they may be enabled at the Master's coming to pay him his own with usury. (385-6)

Thinking of Caroline inside her uncle's grim house spending much of her time weeping in despair, while Shirley buries her gift for poetry under her own ignorance and diffidence, one is apt to reflect that this twelve-year-old girl possesses more courage and commonsense than any other character in the novel. Moreover, in contrast to Caroline and Shirley, she is free from romantic obsession and is therefore capable of leading a full life without marriage: the future existence the narrator projects for her on "wild, luxuriant...virgin soil" equates virginity (or the single life) with freedom, a notion reiterated later in the novel as Shirley surrenders her virginity and simultaneously her freedom by marrying Louis. In contrast to Shirley, Rose remains spiritually free by choosing to live in an untamed although lonely environment.

Young Jessy functions as another potential New Woman and as an alter ego for Caroline, particularly in her relationship to Robert. Ironically, she has inherited her mother's personality, but uses this extraordinary strength of character in a positive, self-liberating way. Rather than repressing her emotions and oppressing other people as Mrs. Yorke does, Jessy unashamedly asks for what she wants, and usually gets it. Her function as a double for Caroline is first evident in her attraction

to Robert, and then in the emphasis on her white dress, which is much like the one Caroline wears in several key scenes with Robert. Moreover, she does what Caroline longs to do, demanding affection from Robert by spontaneously jumping on his lap, and then insisting that he keep a promise he once made to marry her, thus proving herself the opposite of the passive "lover feminine." She also exclaims that "he is too bonnie to be false" (172), a direct echo of Caroline's thoughts before he rejects her. Jessy requests, and again receives, another of Caroline's wishes, an invitation to the Hollow. However, she is more than a doppleganger figure, as her outspokenness and candid disapproval of the conditions of silence and subordination into which women are indoctrinated are indicative of hope for a freer generation of women to come. To her mother's admonition that "it becomes all children, especially girls, to be silent in the presence of their elders," Jessy promptly and logically replies, "Why have we tongues then?" (172), thus illustrating her refusal to be silenced. Her awareness of the privileging of males over females in her social milieu is evident in the inequality she observes in her own family:

> "There are plenty of people," continued she, "who take notice of the boys: all my uncles and aunts seem to think their nephews better than their nieces; and when gentlemen come here to dine, it is always Matthew, and Mark, and Martin that are talked to, and never Rose and me." (173)

It is all the more poignant that such a vibrant potential "free woman" dies young. Although her death is usually viewed by critics as a sentimental fictionalization of the death of Martha Taylor in Brussels (even the otherwise-perceptive Helene Moglen claims that "Brontë's depiction of Jessy's eventual death on a foreign shore, while moving, *is* perhaps extraneous," 168), this scene is in reality of great thematic import. Jessy possesses Rose's capacity for independence, but unlike her elder sister, is cut down before she reaches full bloom. Significantly, in Chapter Twenty-three, while boldly and wittily repeating political opinions she has learned from her

father, she is interrupted in full flow by the narrator's elegy for her, a representation of the similar breaking-off of her life. In this context, she represents women in her society who, like Caroline and Shirley, aspire to independence but fail to attain it. Because Caroline and Shirley conform to social expectations and become conventionally submissive wives, they, like Jessy, are never allowed to fully mature, but remain in a dependent, child-like state.

The half-grown Yorke boys are important as examples of patriarchal attitudes in the process of formation. It is probably not coincidental that the two eldest brothers, Matthew and Mark, have names derived from from Christ's apostles, for like them, Matthew and Mark are products of patriarchal religion and thinking. Matthew represents the rights of primogeniture. As the eldest son, he is unquestioningly allowed to tyrannize, a right which he exercises to its fullest, and his siblings are expected to give way to his temper at all times. Significantly, the imagery assigned to him inverts that of the nature symbolism associated with Rose: rather than being blooming, he is "dragon's teeth...sown among Mr. Yorke's young olive branches" (169). Ominously, the narrator predicts that "discord will one day be the harvest" (169). If Matthew is the tyranny inherent within the patriarchal structure, Mark is its oppressive, joyless aspect, his "still, unmoved, phlegmatic" (169) temperament resulting in his complete inability to enjoy life. He is like his father carried to an extreme, for whilst Mr. Yorke is unable to understand or appreciate literature, Mark is unable to comprehend youth, poetry, or enthusiasm for anything. The youngest son, Martin, is a more ambiguous character, for he is said to possess more eagerness for life, and is certainly a more original character than his brothers. Superficially, he seems to share the opinions of his elders, appearing to echo the curates as he declares that "I hate all womenites" (175), but his father accurately perceives this attitude as youthful affectation, for later in the novel, Martin takes considerable risks to procure a kiss from Caroline. However,

there is the sense that he has absorbed his misogyny from the atmosphere around him, and very probably because he resents his oppressive mother. Certainly, he has learned to argue (or rather, snipe) like an adult: the excessive bickering between him and Matthew in the guise of a debate about the merits of free speech often sounds like an echo of the mixture of intellect and abuse in conversations between adults like Yorke and Helstone. And although Matthew and Martin are less dull and trivial-minded than the curates, they are equally malicious toward each other. Surrounded by such males, inside and outside their harshly-run home, it is unsurprising both that Robert should seem attractive to Rose and Jessy in comparison to their brothers (especially as he partially redeems his previous behaviour by seeking work for William Farren), and that the girls must eventually leave England to escape male domination. Within England as it is now structured, there is little scope for female imagination or capabilities.

Chapter 10, "Old Maids," is another key section in the integration of the themes of public and private tyrannies with those of gender apartheid. The chapter begins and ends with seasonal metaphors. The return of spring to England fails to bring with it the renewal of life traditionally associated with this time of year, for "still her poor were wretched, still their employers were harassed: commerce, in some of its branches, seemed threatened with paralysis, for the war continued" (183). Indeed, it seems as if conditions are in a state of regression. At the heart of this moral rot is the merchant class -- in this text, primarily represented by Yorke and Moore -- whose sole interest in demanding peace is so that sanctions on trade will be lifted and their businesses can prosper. At this point the narrative persona relinquishes his/her usual tone of ironic detachment and blazes into a denouncement of a class whose primary tendency is to marginalize every sector save their own:

> They do not know what others do in the way of helping, pleasing, or

> teaching their race; they will not trouble themselves to inquire: whoever is not in trade is accused of eating the bread of idleness, of passing a useless existence. Long may it be ere England really becomes a nation of shopkeepers! (184)

This diatribe sets the tone for the treatment of men throughout the chapter, for they are invariably shown to be obsessed with their own concerns and opinions to the exclusion of all else. Helstone, a pro-war sympathizer, quarrels with Robert, who insists on peace at any cost to avoid personal ruin. The "Cossack" then proceeds to exercise his paternal benevolence by forbidding Caroline to take French lessons from the "dangerous people" at the Hollow, ostensibly because the French language is a "bad and frivolous one at the best, and most of the works it boasted were bad and frivolous, highly injurious to weak female minds" (185). Caroline is too miserable to care, having realized that she and Robert are unquestionably separated, since his concern with business is so excessive that he fails to glance at her even in the relative safety of church:

> By instinct Caroline knew, as she examined that clouded countenance, that his thoughts were running in no familiar or kindly channel; that they were far away, not merely from her, but from all which she could comprehend, or in which she could sympathize. Nothing that they had ever talked of together was now in his mind: he was wrapt from her by interests and responsibilities in which it was deemed such as she could have no part. (188)

Her observations cause her to examine the relations between the sexes, leading her to the conclusion that the "mysteries of business" are nearly impossible to comprehend for someone as far removed from the male sphere as she is, just as they were for the workers' delegation in the "Noah and Moses" chapter, a sector which must also observe male authority from a remote position. The gap between Robert's obsession with business and Caroline's preoccupation with the private world of domestic love is an unbridgeable one, as she finally realizes when she concludes "Different, indeed...is Robert's mental condition to mine: I think only of him; he has no room, no leisure to think of me" (188).

Caroline's reaction to this final rejection is again to retreat into self-enclosure at the Rectory, but this time to contemplate the meaning of rejection, and with it, the possibility of spinsterhood. It is well-documented that in the nineteenth-century, remaining unmarried was for a woman often a frightening and exceedingly distasteful prospect. In Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, Françoise Basch paints a despairing picture of the life of an unmarried woman:

> In the middle classes, the old maid led a withdrawn, melancholic, embarrassed existence. A contemporary saw her as a sad shadow who, having renounced all personal existence, consoled, listened, helped, and resigned herself to living through others and then effaced herself more and more, as if to excuse her existence. "Single woman! Is there not something plaintive in the two words standing together?" exclaimed the author of Our Single Women. Still young, or relatively young, doomed to a materially difficult existence, the languishing spinster pined away during the degrading wait for a husband expected to provide her with board, lodging and a purpose in life thrown in. (105)

This description is an excellent summary of Caroline's findings as she ventures forth to discover what "old maids" do with their lives. Her surmises, that unmarried women are expected to become surrogate "angels in the house" and give their lives up to the service of others, prove only too correct. The first old maid she visits, Miss Mann, is as grim and unfeminine as her name suggests, but solely because of the way the unhappy conditions of her life have shaped her. Perhaps the best illustration of her joyless existence is in the vignette in which Caroline remembers Robert's reaction to being subjected to her gaze and "professed to doubt whether, since that infliction, his flesh had been quite what it was before, -- whether there was not something stony in its texture," (194), the latter image denoting the general insensitivity shown to Miss Mann's "cruel, slow-wasting obstinate" sufferings (195). Men are also unkind to the ugly, poverty-stricken but infinitely charitable Miss Ainley (whose name, not coincidentally, sounds like "saintly"), and again, a division

between the insensitive men and the more perceptive women in the community is implied:

> Her welcome to Caroline was formal, even in its kindness -- for it was kind; but Miss Helstone excused this. She knew something of the benevolence of the heart which beat under that starched kerchief; all the neighbourhood -- at least all the female neighbourhood -- knew something of it: no one spoke against Miss Ainley except lively young gentlemen, and inconsiderate old ones, who declared her hideous. (197)

Both Miss Mann and Miss Ainley lead lives which consist mainly of doing good to others without receiving much appreciation in return, and have only attained some measure of tranquillity after years of determined discipline and repression of feeling. "Does virtue lie in abnegation of self?" Caroline asks at the beginning of her quest (190). Answer: it emphatically does not. However, for the moment, there seems to be no other option for her than to spend her time emulating these unfortunate women by performing charitable works in order to obliterate her personal pain. Unsurprisingly, sewing for the poor is an inadequate substitute for the loss of love, and the chapter ends with another seasonal metaphor, this one regarding Caroline's spiritual state:

> Winter seemed conquering her spring: the mind's soil and its treasures were freezing gradually to barren stagnation. (199)

Just as springtime in England proves to be a mere superficial covering of her inner moral decay and the unhappy condition of her people, Caroline's youth is no defense against the stagnation, futility and negation of the self which is all that society offers women without fortune and prospects and which cause Caroline to utter "a funereal inner cry" (199).

The analogous positions of women and the working classes as depicted by Charlotte Brontë are unenviable, to say the least. Thinking of these marginalized

sectors, one is apt to apply to them such modern-day terms as "second class citizens," "have-nots," and "Other" (or, to paraphrase some feminist critics, "Insignificant Other"). An examination of the principal male characters in these chapters and the attitudes they represent provides a dismaying vision of what women and the lower classes were up against. Helstone, with his granite-hard notions of Christianity and his obnoxious acolytes the curates, and Yorke with his property, influence and undisputed position as authority figure, are the traditional patriarchy, with centuries of male-centered religion and culture behind them to augment their power. The new order, Economic Man, as represented by Robert Moore, is interchangeable with the old in its lack of liberalism and charity, for Robert's creed "Forward" is as hard and loveless as Helstone's religion, and he is as determined as any patriarch to prevail over all opposition, without considering whether or not his opponents have just reason for complaint. It is not surprising, then, that women and workers are continually depicted as debilitated victims, for they are faced with near-insurmountable obstacles in their battles for any progress of their own. The weavers break up machinery to protest rising unemployment rates, and they are mercilessly hunted down; Caroline consoles herself for her caged-up existence with unrealistic daydreams, and tries but fails to reform the morally inpenetrable Robert; Rose and Jessy Yorke lay plans for a rebellion against parental authority which will be long in coming to fruition; and the "old maids" Miss Mann and Miss Ainley quietly sacrifice themselves to others and receive little thanks for their efforts. In the midst of this futility, the only real action the oppressed can take is to utter cries of anger or grief. Accordingly, the narrative is punctuated with such cries: the landlady's son for his lost cake, eaten by the ever-consuming curates; the weavers over their lost jobs; and Caroline over the emotional repression and loveless condition that is starving and killing her.

CHAPTER II: SHIRLEY AND FEMALE BONDING

The second third of the novel focuses on the characterization of the principal heroine Shirley; her bonding with Caroline; and her effect on the community at large. The introduction of an outspoken, unconventional, and independent young heiress is indeed an unanticipated shock to the community of Briarfield, but in a place ruled by the austere authority figures Helstone and Yorke, where young people, especially girls like Caroline, are continually repressed, Shirley's presence is a welcome change. Because she is wealthy, beautiful and charming, she can subdue men, although she must often resort to such tactics as imitating their behaviour. At the same time, she ameliorates the deplorably low level of feminine self-esteem she observes around her by befriending Caroline and encouraging her to speak freely, and by ridiculing or revising patriarchal myths which are derogative of women. However, Shirley by no means eradicates the standard social condition of female powerlessness. Taking action is still the exclusive prerogative of the male sphere, as demonstrated in the novel's closest facsimile of an epic battle scene, the attack on the mill by rioters: this conflict takes place on Shirley's property without her consent or (as the men suppose) her knowledge. Moreover, Shirley's wealth and property make her a "prize" for fortune-hunting suitors, as Robert Moore's unwelcome and self-seeking advances indicate. Even female bonding is not a panacea for the painful female condition, for Caroline's unhappy emotional state is exacerbated by her knowledge of Robert's ambition to marry Shirley, and this factor, combined with the hopelessness of her life, causes her to sicken. However, maternal love, in the form of the return of her absent mother, is posited as a life-giving substitute for male lovelessness.

The advent of Shirley in Chapter Eleven, "Fieldhead," marks a major thematic transition which extends itself over the middle third of the novel. The

chapter begins with an atmosphere of alienation and dissociation with Caroline's unhappy situation and ends with unconventionality in the form of Shirley and unity in her newly-forged friendship with Caroline. The beginning of the chapter finds Caroline at a woefully low point in her life, longing for Robert and a change in her surroundings, both of which are denied her, and suffering acutely from mother-want. Helstone, predictably, is a complete hindrance to her. Although he notices her wasted appearance, he attributes it to what is to him the mystifying female nature, using nature and food imagery to describe the annoying changes he observes in his niece:

> These women are incomprehensible. They have the strangest knack of startling you with unpleasant surprises. To-day you see them bouncing, buxom, red as cherries, and round as apples; tomorrow they exhibit themselves effete as dead weeds, blanched and broken down. And the reason of it all? that's the puzzle. She has her meals, her liberty, a good house to live in, and good clothes to wear, as usual: a while since that sufficed to keep her handsome and cheery, and there she sits now a poor, little, pale, puling chit enough. (204)

Although he is a clergyman and supposedly familiar with spiritual ills, the notion of emotional starvation never occurs to him. He indignantly refuses her request to seek employment as a governess because "I will not have it said that my niece is a governess" (204) (and, implicitly, that he is incapable of providing for her), attributing her desire for change to the usual "fantastical and whimsical" traits which are all he has perceived in the female nature. Interestingly, nature imagery is used in conjunction with Caroline's inevitable further decline: unlike the "blooming," spiritually free Rose Yorke, the stagnating Caroline is compared to a once-blooming plant falling into decay which "the seeds of consumption, decline, or slow fever" (205) could easily kill.

Ironically, it is Helstone who provides her with the much-needed change by insisting that she accompany him to meet the heiress of Fieldhead, Shirley Keeldar.

Nature imagery is also prevalent in Shirley's first appearance, but is employed in a radically different way than it is with Caroline:

> There is real grace in ease of manner, and so old Helstone felt when an erect, slight girl walked up to him, retaining with her left hand her little silk apron full of flowers, and, giving him her right hand, said pleasantly:--
>
> "I knew you would come to see me, though you *do* think Mr. Yorke has made me a Jacobin. Good morning." (210)

Immediate contrasts are apparent between the two girls. Unlike the diffident Caroline, Shirley displays an easy, comfortable manner. She captures Helstone's attention at once, a feat Caroline has failed to achieve in the twelve years she has lived with him. She speaks openly and forthrightly, whereas Caroline remains silent throughout most of the scene. Rather than being associated with dead weeds and dying plants, as Caroline is, she is connected with silk and flowers. Most importantly, she is unencumbered with restrictions imposed by parents or guardians, poverty, or landlessness, impediments with which Caroline, like most women of her time, is afflicted acutely. Shirley's unusual status as independent heiress and landowner, as well as her sense of humor, is the reason for her pose -- exceedingly bold for the time -- as a sort of male manqué. Unlike Caroline, she must make forays into the male sphere to transact business with her tenants, particularly Robert Moore:

> Business! Really the word makes me conscious that I am indeed no longer a girl, but quite a woman and something more. I am an esquire: Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my style and title. They gave me a man's name; I hold a man's position: it is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood. (213)

So different is Shirley's position in life to Caroline's that it is tempting simply to dichotomize the two as opposites, as Tess Cosslett explains in Woman to Woman: Female Friendship in Victorian Fiction:

> We could see them as another variant on the angel/monster...opposition, with Caroline as the blonde, conventional womanly heroine, and Shirley as the dark, unconventional, gifted woman. (114)

However, as Cosslett realizes, such an argument is reductive, for Caroline often rebels against her "womanly" role, and Shirley's male role-playing is never taken seriously, as Helstone's patronizing replies to her "gentlemanly" speeches indicate. Moreover, the strong association of Shirley with nature and the nurturing behaviour she often displays endow her with "womanly" qualities of her own.

Despite their contrasting manners and positions, the two girls also have a number of affinities; in fact, the similarities between Shirley and Caroline are as immediately apparent as their differences. It has frequently been suggested that Shirley often functions as a double for Caroline, as in Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, in which it is argued that Shirley affords an escape to Caroline from immobilization by offering her an example of unconstricted behaviour:

> But here repression signals the emergence of a free and uninhibited self that is not criminal. That Shirley is Caroline's double, a projection of all her repressed desire, becomes apparent in the acts she performs "for" Caroline. What Shirley does is what Caroline would like to do. (382)

The first of Shirley's liberating acts on Caroline's behalf is to defend Robert and his political opinions to Helstone, asserting that Robert's anti-war stance is justifiable in light of the damage that trade sanctions have done to his business, and that "He looks the gentleman, in my sense of the term" (214). Caroline, who has scarcely spoken except to attempt to stop an incipient quarrel from breaking out, echoes in what is for her a bold manner, "Decidedly he is so" (214). It is seemingly an insignificant statement, but one that marks one of her first acts of direct self-

expression. Later, Shirley will perform further acts that Caroline's powerlessness has prevented her from enacting herself. Because she is rich, Shirley can attain the relationship, business and otherwise, with Robert that Caroline's poverty has made impossible for her to gain. As owner of the land on which Robert's mill stands, Shirley is automatically annexed to his cloth trade, much as Caroline had once wished to be apprenticed to it; moreover, Shirley enacts another of Caroline's wishes, saving him from bankruptcy by securing him a loan, and in the process, gaining the attention from him that he has denied to Caroline. Unlike Caroline, Shirley refuses to allow herself to be ignored by him, as she demonstrates by deliberately following him as he leaves the school feast and insisting that he bid her goodnight when he has omitted to do so. She also verbalizes Caroline's silent and long-felt resentment toward the curates, first by laughing at Malone's awkward attempts at courtship, and then by repaying Donne's derogation of Yorkshire, a trait which Caroline has always found detestable in him, and unmannerly demands for money by unhesitatingly ordering him out of her house. As landowner, she has the power to reject whom she pleases; moreover, she is unhampered by the conventional sense of propriety which habitually forces Caroline into false politeness. Rather than retreating into silent, lethargic self-enclosure as Caroline does during "The Curates at Tea" chapter, Shirley exteriorizes her anger and takes action to rid herself of persons she finds morally repugnant.

Chapter 12, "Shirley and Caroline," is also an important section for its development of the theme of female bonding. The early scenes in their friendship are remarkable for their serenity of tone, a marked contrast to the emphasis placed in previous chapters on emotional torment, particularly Caroline's over Robert. Significantly, the first real conversation between Caroline and Shirley takes place in a natural setting, Nunnelly Common, a place which Tess Cosslett views as one of the text's central symbols of female bonding:

> As the scene progresses, the "Nature" they appreciate and identify with becomes more nurturing and explicitly female, but also associated with ruins and the distant, vanishing past. The projected expedition to Nunnwood promises entry to a secret, secluded female space, a long-lost female world...The ruined nunnery evokes a lost world of female community -- the women agree that the natural magic of the wood would be destroyed by male company. (123)

Certainly, this world of nature and quietude is diametrically opposed to the noisy, competitive and often violent world of male industry, as Shirley realizes in her contrast of the "peaceful joy" of nature worship with the anxiety and trouble experienced by those who forget nature (a probable reference to Robert and those like him). The disruptive atmosphere of the male sector is the reason the two find male company incongruous with the peace of the Common and agree to exclude men from their expeditions. The female bonding Caroline finds with Shirley and later Mrs. Pryor is beneficial to her, for she is finally able to speak of the harshness of her uncle and her admiration of Robert without the awkward social falsity she displays to other women in the community in "The Curates at Tea" chapter. In Mrs. Pryor, she finds a mother-figure whose sympathetic interest in her is a "relief" and "a happy change" (229) from the habitual coldness she receives from her uncle. She articulates the healing effect of her new friendships to Shirley:

> Shirley, I never had a sister -- you never had a sister; but it flashes on me at this moment how sisters feel towards each other. Affection twined with their life, which no shocks of feeling can uproot, which little quarrels only trample an instant that it may spring more freshly when the pressure is removed; affection that no passion can ultimately outrival, with which even love itself cannot do more than compete in force and truth. Love hurts us so, Shirley: it is so tormenting, so racking, and it burns away our strength with its flame; in affection is no pain and no fire, only sustenance and balm. (265)

Romantic, heterosexual love is presented as a sort of hell, complete with fire imagery, destructive and unbearably painful. Female community, in the form of sisterly/motherly love, is contrastingly envisioned as a panacea for the emotional

pain of male/female divisions. Unfortunately, however, a manless, peaceful, nature-centered world is not a complete cure for disappointment in love, for even a female utopia such as the three women manage to achieve at times is ultimately unable to overcome the heroines' conventional longings for marriage.

The references to Nunnwood and convents are also related to a prevalent theme in the novel, that of virgin freedom and the conflict between the longing of women for independence and the romantic notions of marriage they have absorbed. Shirley's contradictory comments are particularly interesting in this context. At first, she appears to advocate the advantages of a single life: she claims that not being her own mistress would "suffocate" her; she refuses to be "a burden and a bore" to the man she marries; and she is glad, she says, that she can "fold my independence round me like a mantle" (224) and retreat into self-enclosure when she pleases. However, when Caroline speaks of her uncle's opinion of men who marry as fools, Shirley reveals a distinctive split in her subjective self by disagreeing and describing a male ideal of kindness, patience, and finally, in near-biblical visionary terms, nobility:

> I tell you when they <men> are good, they are the lords of the creation, -- they are the sons of God. Moulded in their Maker's image, the minutest spark of His spirit lifts them almost above mortality. Indisputably, a great, good, handsome man is the first of created things. (225-6)

Moreover, she displays an unmistakable adherence to the accepted doctrine of male mastery, and in her vision of herself looking reverently up at her ideal, of female submission:

> Nothing ever charms me more than when I meet my superior -- one who makes me sincerely feel that he is my superior...the higher above me, so much the better: it degrades to stoop -- it is glorious to look up. (226)

Despite her surface unconventionality of thought and action, and the undoubted unconventionality of her position in society, Shirley's views at this point resemble a more poetic and optimistically-expressed version of Caroline's on Robert, although she denies (falsely, as the reader is to discover later) Caroline's assertion that she is "already caught" by love.

However, several impediments arise to cause a rupture which prevents Shirley and Caroline from fully sustaining one another. First, there is Caroline's longing for Robert, and her lack of optimism, which causes her to project a future in which Robert will marry Shirley and live a life of unparalleled bliss, whilst she will be completely forgotten. Her suspicions are not unfounded, for Robert does indeed have nuptial designs on the "rich, youthful, and lovely" (but especially rich) Shirley. Although Caroline bears Shirley no ill-will, and in fact approves of Robert's taste, the situation causes their friendship to lose its healing power for her and to become yet another source of pain. As she surreptitiously watches Robert and Shirley walking together, she describes her misery in near-suicidal terms: "Truly I ought not to have been born: they should have smothered me at first cry" (240). Significantly, as she noiselessly disappears, she is described as a "shadow," and later, in one of their rare meetings, Robert tells her that he often imagines her as a phantom haunting him, images which denote the gradual death of her spirit.

The other impediment to the efficacy of female friendship is Robert's disruptive presence, as revealed by the nature of his discourse with Shirley in Chapter Thirteen after Caroline leaves the scene. The communication between them is conducted on two entirely different levels. When speaking about enlisting Helstone's aid to prevent possible revenge on Robert by Barraclough's followers, Shirley is both businesslike and dryly humourous, ironically describing the feminine charm and cajolements she will have to use on the Rector; however, she never displays this type of flirtation toward Robert. In contrast, Robert tries to force her

into the role of charming female, making several efforts at direct compliments and indirect but obvious wooing, but is blocked at each attempt by Shirley's refusal to respond. Their behaviour in this scene is comparable to a reversal of the situation between Mr. Rochester and Blanche Ingram in Jane Eyre, in which Blanche tries to elicit a marriage proposal from the uninterested Rochester for his money, and Jane notes with satisfaction, "I felt he had not given her his love, and that her qualifications were ill-adapted to win from him that treasure...*she could not charm him*" (215). Had Caroline remained present, she might well have made a similar observation regarding Robert's failed efforts to win Shirley.

One of Shirley's most valuable contributions to Caroline's life is her revisionary thinking, whether the subject be literature, patriarchal religion, or Robert. Chapter Fourteen begins on much the same note as Chapter Eleven, with the dejected Caroline masochistically brooding on the dreary life she is certain she will lead. She then describes in lofty terms her sentiments about Robert and her grief over his impending marriage to Shirley, ending with a resolution to leave him and Briarfield, melodramatically expressed as "Sunder me then, Providence. Part us speedily" (262). Shirley's entrance quickly dispels her friend's self-pity, as she is in one of her "masculine" moods, brisk, authoritative, and unsparingly outspoken. She immediately discerns the reason for Caroline's unsociability, and upbraids her for her grief over Robert's neglect, going so far as to posit herself as a rival for Caroline's affections:

> All my comfort...is broken up by his manoeuvres. He keeps intruding between you and me: without him we should be good friends; but that six feet of puppyhood makes a perpetually recurring eclipse of our friendship. Again and again he crosses and obscures the disk I want always to see clear: ever and anon he renders me to you a mere bore and nuisance. (264)

Shirley's sexual ambiguity at this point has often proven puzzling to critics and

readers alike. It is tempting in a modern context to see her as an aggressive lesbian, or at least, as Pauline Nestor does in Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, to view her relationship with Caroline as one that conforms to the "heterosexual norm," with Shirley as suitor manqué. Nestor views Shirley's "courtship" as "a rehearsal for the real" (119) for Caroline, with Shirley becoming a lover substitute for the purpose of preparing her friend for her eventual union with Robert. However, my own view is that Shirley's masculine role-playing is a playful but pointed means of deflating Caroline's unrealistically romantic/heroic view of Robert. Unlike Caroline, Shirley is well aware of Robert's immaturity, particularly in his dealings with other people:

> He is a puppy -- your cousin: a quiet, serious, sensible, judicious, ambitious puppy. I see him standing before me, talking his half-stern, half-gentle talk, bearing me down (as I am very conscious he does) with his fixity of purpose, etc.; and then -- I have no patience with him! (264)

Shirley's disgust with his "fixity of purpose" (referring to his determination to defeat his enemies, make a success of his cloth trade, and gain her help and perhaps her hand by paying compliments to her) is a possible reassurance to Caroline that she recognizes his ploys for what they are and has no intention of encouraging him. She also offers her friendship as a cure for Caroline's obvious unhappiness, which she perceives as destructive to her friend's spirit:

> There is a sort of unhappiness which not only depresses, but corrodes -- and that, I fear, is your portion. Will pity do you any good, Lina? If it will, take some from Shirley: she offers largely, and warrants the article genuine. (265)

In contrast to Robert, who offers nothing but stony denial of feeling, Shirley offers genuine love and compassion, again suggesting the superiority of female bonding and sustenance over conventional heterosexual/romantic love with its attendant

emotional pain.

Shirley not only offers Caroline a soothing friendship, but also revisionary modes of thinking in regard to patriarchal myths and literature. Shirley in her role as storyteller reverses male-centered conventions and questions the different ways men and women "read" each other. Again, Shirley's discourse serves to revive Caroline's flagging spirits. As a means of dissolving Caroline's "melancholy dreams" of the graves which reputedly lie under the rectory kitchen, an image which suggests that she is figuratively buried alive, Shirley suggests that the two take an excursion which, although it never materalizes, provides her with an opportunity to indulge in the expression of her own vastly different dreams. Figuratively, the journey Shirley describes is one in which she and Caroline will relinquish both patriarchal restrictions and the false, derogatory identities which have been thrust upon them by the male imagination. Caroline says that on the sea journey she longs to see whales, "a hundred of them, perhaps, wallowing, flashing, rolling in the wake of a patriarch bull, huge enough to have been spawned before the flood" (249), symbolically expressing her awe of male authority. Shirley, however, recognizes the dangers of such a powerful force, which can metaphorically submerge them, and so she rejects it, asserting that "I should not like to be capsized by the patriarch bull" (249). She also repudiates the image of the mermaid, a symbolic rendering of the temptress qualities, or dangerous female sexuality, men ascribe to women. In the fiction she weaves around the appearance of this figure, she recognizes that the "temptress-terror" is nothing but a "monstrous likeness of ourselves" (249) bearing no resemblance to reality. In perceiving this image as false, she simultaneously renders it harmless, at least to her vision of her own femininity:

> I see a preternatural lure in its wily glance: it beckons. Were we men, we should spring at the sign, the cold billow would be dared for the sake of the colder enchantress; being women, we stand safe, though not dreadless. She comprehends our unmoved gaze; she feels herself powerless; anger crosses her front; she cannot charm, but she will

> appal us: she rises high, and glides all revealed, on the dark wave-ridge. (249)

This description reveals the essential absurdity of the male fear of ensnarement by female sexuality: when the image of the mermaid-temptress is analyzed sensibly, it becomes ludicrous, its misrepresentation of the female psyche blatantly obvious. But however much Shirley repudiates the image, she cannot eradicate it, and so it retains the power to move her to anger at men who continue to label women as temptresses, terrors, and monsters.

Unfortunately, Shirley is unable to divine the creative force within her which would allow her to express her views in writing and perhaps convince a wider audience of their validity: when Mrs. Pryor asks, "How can you find interest in speaking of a nonentity?", Shirley's only reply is a puzzled "I don't know" (250). Although it is suggested at several points in the text that her failure to write her thoughts stems from indolence, her exchange with Caroline in Chapter 20 shows this failing in a different light. Again, this time with amused irony, Shirley speaks of the male tendency to dichotomize the female nature "for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend" (343), an illusion from which even the creators of "first-rate female characters in first-rate works" are not immune:

> Then to hear them fall into ecstasies with each other's creations, worshipping the heroine of such a poem -- novel -- drama, thinking it fine -- divine! Fine and divine it may be, but often quite artificial -- false as the rose in my best bonnet there. (343)

Clearly, Shirley is aware of the division in male and female perspectives, with men naively believing in the reality of their literary creations, whilst intelligent women like herself perceive the incongruity between fiction and reality. However, she is again prevented from writing her views, partly because men control literature and

would utterly reject Shirley's vision of the truth:

> Women read men more truly than men read women. I'll prove that in a magazine paper some day when I've time; only it will never be inserted: it will be "declined with thanks," and left for me at the publisher's. (343)

But male suppression of the feminine viewpoint is not the sole reason for Shirley's inability to express a written opinion, as Caroline realizes:

> To be sure: you could not write cleverly enough; you don't know enough; you are not learned, Shirley. (343).

In other words, Shirley's voice is also suppressed because of the lamentable quality of the education offered to women at that time. Having never been taught to articulate arguments in a coherent, logical manner, she is unable to formulate her thoughts in any but a haphazard, fanciful way.

Perhaps the best example of Shirley's challenge to patriarchal religion and canonical literature occurs in Chapter Eighteen. Shirley's first subversive act is her refusal to enter the church in favor of remaining outdoors. In a passage rich in contrastive imagery, the male world, consisting of Dr. Boultby's "long dreary speech," the orations of the curates, the hot gray church and gray tombstones are juxtaposed with the free, nurturing world of "Nature at her evening prayers" (314), an entity associated by Shirley with bright colors, hills, moors and woods. Shirley, a child of nature, instinctively rejects patriarchal religion in favor of female-centered nature worship, and in the process creates what we now term a feminist revisionist myth, in other words, a retelling of a traditional patriarchal myth in which women are empowered. In this instance, Eve, a figure often depicted as weak and corruptible, is characterized by Shirley as a force of nature and the mother of gods and the human race. Moreover, she is endowed with "unexhausted life and uncorrupted

excellence" (315); associated with divine creation in Shirley's assertion that she is "Jehovah's daughter"; allowed equality with Adam; and, as mother of the human race, proclaimed worthy of worship. A still more radical gesture is Shirley's rejection of Milton's vision of Eve and indeed the traditional patriarchal endorsement of Milton as unquestionable authority figure. To Caroline's remark that Shirley's vision of Eve as mother-goddess "when she and Adam stood alone on earth" does not correspond to Milton's version of Eve, Shirley boldly reverses the notion advanced by the narrative in Paradise Lost that Milton's blindness afforded him celestial vision, as Gilbert and Gubar explain:

> Even the blindness to which this epic speaker occasionally refers makes him appear godlike rather than handicapped. Cutting him off from "the cheerful ways" of ordinary mortals...it elevates him above trivial fleshly concerns and causes "Celestial light" to "shine inward" upon him so that like Tiresias, Homer and God, he may see the mysteries of the spiritual world and "tell/Of things invisible to mortal sight." (Pl 3.55) (211)

Conversely, to Shirley, Milton is as metaphorically blind as he was literally sightless in regard to his ability to read the female nature. She goes so far as to claim that in depicting Eve "It was his cook that he saw; or it was Mrs. Gill, as I have seen her, making custards" (315): in other words, Milton's poetry overlooks the intelligence and nobility Shirley believes women to possess and attributes to them nothing more than weakness and mediocrity.

The effect of Shirley as potential poet and subversive force is first evident as Caroline is inspired by Shirley's vision of a mother-goddess to recognize the importance of maternal love and to long for her own absent mother. Later, she displays a rare boldness in an exchange with the novel's arch-misogynist, Joe Scott. From his first appearance, Joe is an offensive figure in his refusal to argue with Shirley about business and current affairs on the grounds that he adheres to St. Paul's doctrine. He therefore insists that women be silent, submissive and on no

account attempt to teach or usurp authority over men. In reality, his views are an implicit expression of his resentment over working on land owned by a woman. Caroline unexpectedly intervenes with a revisionist reading of her own, delivered with a spirited air obviously culled from Shirley:

> I dare say, if I could read the original Greek, I should find that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misapprehended altogether. It would be possible, I doubt not, with a little ingenuity, to give the passage quite a contrary turn; to make it say, "Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection"; -- "it is permitted to a woman to teach and to exercise authority as much as may be. Man, meantime, cannot do better than hold his peace," and so on. (323)

A valiant effort, but one that is of no avail, for Caroline has never been taught to read Greek, and it is perhaps this admission which prompts Joe to mock her for asking Robert's help in solving a simple sum, and then to claim that Shirley's attention to business is mere vanity and pretence. Again, the lack of formal education available to women at the time is used as a means of creating diffidence within them which silences their efforts at self-expression.

Shirley's influence is not restricted to Caroline, but extends itself to the community at large. The theme developed in Chapter Fourteen, "Shirley Seeks to be Saved by Works," in which she formulates plans to save her lands from insurrection and the poor from starvation, is also related to two other themes, the division of Shirley's subjective self and concomitantly, the familiar one of gender apartheid. The formation of Shirley's scheme is particularly interesting because it reveals the division in her attitudes, as she wavers between resolutions to keep peace at all costs (in this text, a feminine trait) and declarations of war which are distinctly masculine in tone. She first states her intentions in a straightforward, self-interested masculine manner, saying that her wish to relieve the poor is a result of her "landed-proprieter and lord-of-the-manner conscience" (266) rather than any

private need to dispense charity: in other words, her "good works" are a practical means of saving her property from destruction by angry workers. Yet shortly after, she displays an inordinate interest in the domestic sphere as she resolves to reform her housekeeper in matters of household economy. Moreover, she strongly hints that her desire to help the poor stems from a sensitivity to suffering (a female-identified trait noticeably lacking in male characters such as Robert, Helstone, and the curates) and a genuine desire to practice altruistic charity and thereby "prevent mischief," in contrast to the war-mongering male characters who are frequently in the mood for what the curate Malone refers to as a "shindy." Caroline again draws attention to Shirley's failure to adhere to narrow-minded convention, prompting Shirley to voice her rejection of common opinion:

> "Some people say we shouldn't give alms to the poor, Shirley."
> "They are great fools for their pains. For those who are not hungry, it is easy to palaver about the degradation of charity, and so on; but they forget the brevity of life, as well as its bitterness. We have none of us long to live: let us help each other through seasons of want and woe, as well as we can, without heeding in the least the scruples of vain philosophy." (268)

She then turns abruptly from this feminine-sounding discourse on universal love to a masculine one on the importance of property, class division, and war, in which she becomes a surrogate for Robert:

> "If once the poor gather and rise in the form of the mob, I shall turn against them as an aristocrat: if they bully me, I must defy; if they attack, I must resist, -- and I will."
> "You talk like Robert."
> "I feel like Robert, only more fierily. Let them meddle with Robert, or Robert's mill, or Robert's interests, and I shall hate them. At present I am no patrician, nor do I regard the poor round me as plebians; but if once they violently wrong me or mine, and then presume to dictate to us, I shall quite forget pity for their wretchedness and respect for their poverty, in scorn of their ignorance and wrath at their insolence." (268)

Her rapid vacillation between masculine and feminine modes of discourse is perhaps indicative of the uneasy alliance of her changeable identities, that of "Captain Keeldar," property owner and male manqué, and the nurturing mother-figure who enjoys ministering to animals and envisions her wealth as a means of alleviating the misery around her. Her masculine poses may also be indicative of the frustrated energy which causes her to look for a purpose in life not to be found in the passive domesticity of the female sphere. At the beginning of Chapter Seventeen, a similar mood of nonfulfilment emerges as Helstone watches her develop a "longing spirit" while listening to martial music and advises her to "Keep your hand on the reins, captain, and slack the fire of that spirit: it is not wanted; the more's the pity" (299). In other words, Shirley, as a woman, is excluded from the male sphere of action. To the military-minded Helstone, this sphere is one of war and bloodshed, but Shirley perceives it as a spiritual battle in which she will fight for fulfilment of self. As she tells Caroline, she longs for a meaningful life of feeling:

> That music stirs my soul; it wakens all my life; it makes my heart beat: not with its temperate daily pulse, but with a new, thrilling vigour. I almost long for danger; for a faith -- a land -- or, at least, a lover to defend. (299)

By stating her intention to fight for her property against all usurpers, she symbolically penetrates the male sphere and at least finds a land to defend. At the same time, her need to nurture the poor indicates that her allegiance will never be given wholly to the masculine world.

However ambivalent Shirley's inner conflict may be, she is perfectly in control of her role-playing in her dealings with the opposite sex. The latter half of Chapter Fourteen is a prime example of her expertise at sexual politics. While plotting with the Rectors Helstone, Boultby and Hall, with subsidiary help from Caroline, Miss Ainley, and Hall's sister Margaret, to put her plans for relief for the

poor into effect, her pose as "Captain Keeldar" is a conscious means to ensure that her intentions are carried out without being overwhelmed or distorted by male authority. To quote Helene Moglen in Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived:

> Shirley sees men too clearly to allow them to feel comfortable with her. Her queer, significant smile reveals that she is not endowed with the "soft blindness" that is endearing in a woman. But she knows that if there is a purpose to be achieved, she can accomplish it only by playing coquette: manipulating the men she needs so that they think they are manipulating her. (176)

In this section, Shirley transforms herself into a mixture of "Captain Keeldar" and coquette, flirting with the susceptible Helstone while playfully imitating his position as authority figure. Perceiving his suspicion that "female craft was at work" (272), she soothes him by being charmingly deferential, and then, knowing that the women in the group will be ignored, gains power by aligning herself with the men, thus becoming a sort of honorary male, as in her exchange with Helstone:

> "Well -- you are neither my wife nor my daughter, so I'll be led for once; but mind -- I know I *am* led: your little female manoeuvres don't blind me."
>
> "Oh!" said Shirley, dipping the pen in the ink, and putting it into his hand, "you must regard me as Captain Keeldar to-day. This is quite a gentleman's affair -- yours and mine entirely, Doctor (so she had dubbed the Rector). The ladies there are only to be our aides-de-camp, and at their peril they speak, till we have settled the whole business." (273)

Although it is perhaps regrettable that she must flatter men while dissociating herself from her own sex, these methods are her sole means of gaining a foothold within the male sphere that will allow her to perform charitable acts, for without the aid of powerful men, it is difficult to accomplish anything. Furthermore, for all Helstone's protests about being led by a woman, her "female manoeuvres" are successful: almost unconsciously, he and the other men put themselves at her disposal and follow her lead entirely. Unlike Miss Ainley and Miss Hall, who refuse to put themselves forward or speak unless spoken to out of deference to the men, Shirley in her role as "Captain Keeldar" speaks with an aggression unusual in a

woman, and thus becomes mistress of the situation. As her significant smile indicates, she enjoys the knowledge that she has transcended the passive role assigned to her in the female sphere and been allowed (at least for the time being) a place in the male camp. After cementing her new position with another feminine wile by feeding the men, she unashamedly celebrates her victory:

> Captain Keeldar was complimented on his taste; the compliment charmed him; it had been his aim to gratify and satisfy his priestly guests: he had succeeded, and was radiant with glee. (274)

Despite her success with the rectors, Shirley's only real action within the male sphere is aiding Helstone and the members of his congregation in a mock-heroic march past Dissenters determined to obstruct them; conversely, in the novel's most important action sequence, the attack on the mill by angry workers, she is never so much as consulted about her property, although she is by no means as unaware or helpless as the men imagine her. During the school-feast, she rightly conjectures that the men she sees grouped together are plotting a significant action from which she as a woman is excluded: "They won't trust me," she said: "that is always the way when it comes to the point" (310). At the beginning of the conflict with the weavers, she is asked by Helstone to play guardian to Caroline and his maids, a supposedly "male" role which is no more than a means of removing her from the site of action, for although she is allowed the use of the rector's pistols, she later realizes that they are of little use against the group of rioters who talk of attacking the house. Realizing that Helstone believes her safely out of the way, she comments ironically to Caroline about male misreading of female perception when the men leave for the battle believing the women to be figuratively as well as literally unconscious of the night's events:

> "Mr. Helstone thinks we have no idea which way he is gone," murmured Miss Keeldar, "nor on what errand, nor with what expectations, nor how prepared; but I guess much -- do not you?"

"I guess something."
"All those gentlemen -- your cousin Moore included -- think that you and I are now asleep in our beds, unconscious." (328)

In fact, Shirley and Caroline become a good deal more aware of the dangerous aspects of the situation than the men after Helstone's house narrowly escapes an attack by the weavers. When Shirley decides to go to the mill and warn Moore of the advent of the marauders, she and Caroline demonstrate unusual tenacity and bravery when allowed a sense of purpose usually denied to women. Negative traits normally associated with women such as physical cowardice and obsession with grooming and dress are superfluous when they are given something more substantial to think of: the normally timid Caroline proves Shirley's equal in overcoming formidable physical obstacles; and as for feminine vanity, "the long hair, the tender skin, the silks and muslins suffered; but what was chiefly regretted was the impediment this difficulty caused to speed" (332).

The battle itself is perhaps the novel's most significant example of both gender apartheid and the unromanticized realism which is the novel's operative principle. Although Shirley and Caroline arrive too late to warn Robert of the impending attack, Caroline is emboldened by Shirley to the extent that she is ready to join Robert to encourage and serve him, not realizing that she is in a situation in which she, and indeed all women, are both unwelcome and redundant. Shirley, however, displays admirable perception and good sense, seeing the conflict and the female exclusion from action in all their inglorious reality, as in the following exchange with Caroline:

Miss Keeldar clasped her round the waist with both arms and held her back. "Not one step shall you stir," she went on authoritatively. "At this moment, Moore would be both shocked and embarrassed, if he saw either you or me. Men never want women near them in time of real danger."
"I would not trouble -- I would help him," was the reply.
"How? By inspiring him with heroism? Pooh! These are not the days of chivalry: it is not a tilt at a tournament we are going to behold, but a struggle about money, and food, and life."

"It is natural that I should be at his side."

"As queen of his heart? His mill is his lady-love, Cary! Backed by his factory and his frames, he has all the encouragement he wants or can know. It is not for love or beauty, but for ledger and broadcloth, he is going to break a spear. Don't be sentimental; Robert is not so." (333-4)

Shirley's remarks are prescient, for with all its potential for epic romanticism and blood-curdling excitement, the battle itself is mundane and ugly. Robert, once again the cold, calculating "Economic Man," is decidedly not in need of feminine encouragement, for he is well-prepared for conflict and utterly determined to save the mill from destruction, and so it is not surprising that the battle lasts less than an hour, and ends with a few rioters wounded and the rest scattered. One feels that the spectators Shirley and Caroline are in a far more fortunate position, for they watch the action in the peaceful, natural periphery of the mill property, separate from the violence and "alone with the friendly night, its mute stars, and these whispering trees" (335), as Shirley says. As Shirley watches "the death and pain replacing excitement and exertion" (338) while the landscape is reduced to "a mere blot of desolation" (337), she dissociates herself from the war-mongering male world and proves unequivocally that her martial identity as "Captain Keeldar" is mere role-playing as she laments, "This is what I wished to prevent" (338).

Shirley's behaviour in the aftermath of the battle is an important example of Brontë's positive juxtaposition of the female sphere with the male: whereas the men engage in destructive behaviour, women do much to repair their damage. Upon arriving at Fieldhead and finding that no provisions have been sent to the wounded, Shirley immediately takes action to remedy the situation. In a more admirable sense, her actions are comparable with Robert's on the previous evening: she shows as much determination in procuring linen, wine and bedding for the wounded, both soldiers and rioters, as Moore does in defeating the rioters, and later, in persecuting their ringleaders. On a smaller scale, Caroline also demonstrates benevolent nurturing qualities, first in soothing Mrs. Pryor after Shirley berates her for not

sending supplies sooner, and then in her insistence on viewing Robert's wound to ensure that it is not serious. The most positive contrast of female attitudes with the male at this point is, however, in Shirley's spirited exchange with Robert at the end of the chapter. When Robert teases her about the overstock of supplies she plans to send, she sensibly replies that she was kept in ignorance of the situation and therefore had no way of gauging how much would be needed, the implication being that men tend to denigrate female ignorance without realizing that they are often the cause of this condition. He also shows complete disregard for the wounded rioters, giving an account of their injuries only when pressed for one by Shirley. When Shirley shows concern for their medical treatment and insists that they be given bedding instead of straw, Robert is disgusted with her and the other women in the community who display charitable impulses toward people who have attempted to block his business interests:

> Mrs. Yorke -- who, like you, seems disposed to regard the rioters as martyrs, and me, and especially Mr. Helstone, as murderers -- is at this moment, I believe, most assiduously engaged in fitting it <Yorke's wagon> up with feather-beds, pillows, bolsters, blankets, etc. The victims lack no attentions -- I promise you. Mr. Hall -- your favourite parson -- has been with them ever since six o'clock, exhorting with them, praying with them, and even waiting on them like any nurse; and Caroline's good friend, Miss Ainley, that *very* plain old maid, sent in a stock of lint and linen, something in proportion of another lady's allowance of beef and wine. (351)

In this speech, Robert unconsciously constructs oppositional behaviour between the women and people like himself, in which reader sympathy is decidedly not in his favour: on one side, there is his selfishness and callousness toward suffering, and on the other, the disinterested charity shown by the community of women, which in this case includes Mr. Hall, who plays the feminine role of missionary/nurse. It is to Shirley's credit that she neatly counters Robert's arrogance with a deliberately oblique reference to her activities of the previous night and an obvious jibe at his

inability to "read" her words or actions:

> So Mr. Helstone domiciled me at the Rectory! Mighty clever you gentlemen think you are! I make you heartily welcome to the idea, and hope its savour, as you chew the cud of reflection upon it, gives you pleasure. Acute and astute, why are you not also omniscient? How is it that events transpire, under your very noses, of which you have no suspicion? It should be so, otherwise the exquisite gratification of out-manoeuvering you would be unknown. Oh! friend, you may search my countenance, but you cannot read it. (351-2)

Appropriately, the chapter ends with Robert puzzled and considerably less apt to take women -- or at least Shirley -- for granted. Shirley may be prohibited from taking any active role in the male sphere -- and perhaps, given the male behaviour in the novel, is better off for her exclusion from their actions -- but in this instance, she is the undoubted winner in the battle of the sexes.

In Chapters Twenty-one to Twenty-six, the novel's emphasis shifts from Shirley back to Caroline and the themes explored in earlier chapters of the dismal options available to single women without prospect of fortune, marriage, or useful occupation. Although Shirley temporarily disappears from the novel (she is, we learn later, waiting for Louis), the theme of female bonding continues to be of primary importance, although the pairing of Shirley and Caroline gives way to the growing relationship between Caroline and Mrs. Pryor. Through their mutual confessions in Chapter Twenty-one, Caroline of her discontent, and Mrs. Pryor of the unhappiness of her past life and warning to Caroline not to repeat her mistakes, the women are drawn together, and although Caroline is disillusioned by what she learns from the older woman, she is also sustained by Mrs. Pryor's maternal comfort. As in most of the significant conversations between Shirley and Caroline, the scene between Caroline and Mrs. Pryor takes place in a natural setting, in this instance a secluded ravine. Again, nature is an authentic "female space": the ravine, which contains "a sense of deep solitude" (360) is a locality in which Mrs. Pryor

relinquishes her "social role" as Shirley's reserved companion and reveals her private self, as does Caroline, although neither is completely candid. In a guarded way, Caroline speaks of her oppressive circumstances and wish to leave Briarfield, omitting her disappointment over Robert's defection and belief that he will marry Shirley. Similarly, Mrs. Pryor reveals her trials as a governess and then an unhappily-married wife, without mentioning that Caroline is in reality her daughter. Much of the criticism on this section focusses on Brontë's clever riposte to critics of Jane Eyre, most notably Elizabeth Rigby's article in the Quarterly Review in December 1848, in which much indignation was expressed over Jane's pride and "ungodly discontent" (Ewbank, 32), much of which Brontë puts into Mrs. Pryor's mouth as she describes her sufferings at the hands of the aptly-named Hardman family, or on the author's examination of a prevalent nineteenth-century social problem which Mrs. Pryor embodies, namely, the unhappy condition of the governess. In this instance, however, I would like the draw attention to the even unhappier condition to which Caroline is reduced by her confrontation with Mrs. Pryor's reality. The older woman's description of the lonely position of the governess as "tabooed woman," necessary for the education of upper-class children but otherwise an anomaly ignored or scorned by society, effectively puts an end to Caroline's illusions that employment as a governess is a viable avenue of escape, for there is undeniable truth in Mrs. Pryor's warning that the already-delicate girl "would contend a while courageously with your doom; then you would pine and grow too weak for your work: you would come home -- if you still had a home -- broken down" (365). Still less encouraging are Mrs. Pryor's views on love and marriage, in which she joins the cynical ranks of Mr. Helstone, Mrs. Yorke, and Miss Mann. Although Caroline persists in her belief that marriage is "the only bright destiny" that can await young women, and that "where affection is reciprocal and sincere, and minds are harmonious, marriage must be happy" (366), Mrs. Pryor's reply is hardly

conducive to a continuation of her romantic fantasies:

> It is never wholly happy. Two people can never literally be as one: there is, perhaps, a possibility of content under peculiar circumstances, such as are seldom combined; but it is as well not to run the risk: you may make fatal mistakes. Be satisfied, my dear: let all the single be satisfied with their freedom. (366)

Based on what she knows of her parents' marriage and her uncle's, Caroline has no choice but to admit that there is some degree of truth in Mrs. Pryor's words. As Gilbert and Gubar note, the older woman's name is appropriate, for she is "the prior woman, prior to Shirley as well as Caroline because her experience...is typically female in the society these young women inhabit" (392). However, her influence on Caroline is far from wholly negative, for she posits an alternative to life with her uncle by suggesting that she and Caroline take a house together when Shirley marries and she becomes redundant in her capacity of companion. Despite the bleak truths this chapter contains, it ends on a note of mutual love and comfort, although Caroline is as yet unable to renounce her ideals of romantic love and consider the maternal love Mrs. Pryor offers as a viable substitute.

Caroline's illness and near-death in Chapter Twenty-four, "The Valley of the Shadow of Death," is another instance of literary significance overshadowed by biographical circumstance. It is a well-known fact, recorded by Winifred Gérin among others, that this chapter was the first to be written after the death of Brontë's sister Anne -- the third successive death of a family member within a nine-month period -- and that Brontë's work at this point was useful to her as what we now call grief therapy (390). Gérin, like many Brontë biographers and critics, also believes that Caroline's physical likeness to Anne, as well as her emotional similarity to the youngest Brontë sister (Anne was by all accounts remarkably patient and brave through her last illness) are a tribute to Charlotte's dead sister (390). Therefore, it is easy to generalize and oversimplify the issue and suggest that Caroline's near-

miraculous recovery is mere wish-fulfilment on Charlotte's part, a fictional manifestation of her longing that her sister had survived. This conjecture may well be true, but that is not to say that Caroline's near-death is an incongruous incident, lacking thematic and structural credibility. The coexistence of Caroline's depression and failing health are long-established facts at this point: such phrases scattered throughout the text as "Winter seemed conquering her spring" (199); "if her constitution had contained the seeds of consumption, decline, or slow fever, these diseases would have been rapidly developed" (205); and "Life wastes fast in such vigils as Caroline had of late but too often kept" (341) have amply prepared the reader for the possibility of her imminent death. Moreover, a number of distressing incidents occur in the two previous chapters to worsen her psychological state. She and Shirley never take their projected sea-voyage, and she is in fact entirely separated from her friend due to the descent of Shirley's relatives the Sympsons at Fieldhead. Alone, she broods, giving rise to her "Men of England" soliloquy in which she both berates male authority for forcing women into inactive roles and begs it to release her from her caged existence and give her something worthwhile to do. In Chapter Twenty-three, she is confronted with the two formidable Yorke women, Rose and her mother. Rose bluntly informs her that she refuses to lead "a long, slow death like yours at Briarfield Rectory," a locale which she compares to a "windowed grave" (384), an observation which accurately reflects Caroline's own feelings about her existence, and, by openly verbalizing them, possibly intensifies her despair. Then she engages in a difficult battle of wits with Mrs. Yorke, boldly countering the older woman's negativity concerning love, marriage and motherhood by spiritedly defending the power of maternal love, the value of loving, and the part emotion and impulse play in her choice of who she will love. Although nominally Caroline is the winner of the argument ("Always speak as honestly as you have done just now...and you'll do," Mrs. Yorke concedes), her victory takes its toll, as she is

left emotionally exhausted. More devastatingly still, Mrs. Yorke cruelly divines the identity of the object "all my impulses will be strong in compelling me to love" (387) by asking, "Is Mr. Robert nowhere hid behind the curtains, do you think, Miss Moore?" (388). The final blow occurs at the end of the chapter, when Caroline is again faced with the unwelcome fact that Robert's impulses do not accord with hers when she notices a bouquet of flowers to him from Shirley. "Her beacon was quenched: her star withdrew" (398), and she falls ill the next day.

Even if the biographical facts of Charlotte Brontë's life at this time were unknown, "The Valley of the Shadow of Death" would still be considered one of the novel's most striking sections, with its vivid and compelling elements of the heroine's near-death; hallucinatory soliloquies by Caroline on the state of the soul in the afterlife; and a dramatic eleventh-hour confession by Mrs. Pryor that she is in fact Caroline's absent mother. Yet despite its distinctive and unique qualities, the chapter incorporates many of the issues germane to the theme of female oppression. Caroline's illness is clearly of psychological origin: the fever she develops is the result of "some sweet, poisoned breeze" (an obvious metaphor for her unrequited love for Robert) combined with "a fever of mental excitement, and a languor of long conflict and habitual sadness" (399). Significantly, her sickness begins with self-starvation, a manifestation of her long-standing emotional deprivation: having been constantly worn down by lack of spiritual sustenance, she deteriorates to the point of being literally unable to take nourishment. The association of woman with nature coalesces in this chapter to emblematize Caroline's mental state: seasonal imagery is used to symbolize her decline in such analogies as "she wasted like any snow-wreath in thaw; she faded like any flower in draught" (401), and, in her delirious musings about the afterlife, her mind is said to resemble "a sad shore, like birds exhausted" (403-4). Unsurprisingly, she focuses much of her attention on Robert. Propped up by her window, waiting to glimpse him riding by on his way to market,

she is again reminiscent of the Lady of Shalott. In fact, the act of looking directly upon him seems to bring a curse upon her similar to the Lady's, in her case, that of a grief-stricken delirium that brings her close to death. Ironically, it is only when her mind is supposedly unsound that she can transcend her role as passive "lover feminine" and speak openly of her longing for him, which she does using mystical imagery much like that in Catherine Earnshaw's deathbed ravings in Wuthering Heights:

> "But he will not know I am ill, till I am gone; and he will come when they have laid me out, and I am senseless, cold, and stiff.
> "What can my departed soul feel then? Can it see or know what happens to the clay? Can spirits, through any medium, communicate with living flesh? Can the dead at all revisit those they leave? Can they come in the elements? Will wind, water, fire, lend me a path to Moore?" (404)

The use of Robert's surname in this context is perhaps meant to imply that to Caroline, Robert's presence is a "mooring," or a safe haven with the potential to provide her with the love and nurturance constantly denied her. God is considered in a similar context as a provider of comfort, strength, and especially the faith that will enable her to face her imminent death. However, when aid arrives, it is not in the form of the two male figures Caroline worships. As Gilbert and Gubar note:

> Caroline, in her illness, searches for faith in God the Father. She finds instead the encircling arms of her mother. (392)

Both Caroline and the reader never feel the powers of female bonding and especially maternal love more acutely or poignantly than during Chapters Twenty-four and Twenty-five, and neither perhaps the emotional disparities between men and women. While Mrs. Pryor watches over her daughter constantly and finally wills her to live by revealing her true identity, the men who surround Caroline are of absolutely no use to her. Robert, unaware of the seriousness of her illness, leaves Briarfield to pursue his favorite activity, hunting down rioters; the doctor who

examines her realizes that he can do nothing for her and leaves after collecting his fee; and Helstone, a figurehead of authority in the community, is reduced to a symbol of impotence in the domestic sphere in his inability to offer emotional sustenance to his niece. Significantly, as Mrs. Pryor sings a hymn of comfort to her, he is reminded of his "forgotten dead wife" Mary Cave. Although he quickly drives the thought out of his mind without troubling to analyze it, the analogy is appropriate, for like Mary, Caroline is dying of neglect, part of which is due to Helstone. Although he is concerned about Caroline's illness when he finally notices it, he largely absents himself from her, and the things he offers -- a doctor's attendance, a cup of tea, morsels of food -- are purely material. During the few moments he spends with her, the two can barely communicate, as evidenced by his misinterpretation of her question about Mrs. Pryor's true identity to mean that she has lost her wits. Finally, he admits his limitations:

> When women are sensible -- and, above all, intelligible -- I can get on with them. It is only the vague superfine sensations, and extremely wire-drawn notions, that put me about. Let a woman ask me to give her an edible or a wearable...I can, at least, understand the demand: but when they pine for they know not what -- sympathy -- sentiment -- some of these indefinite abstractions -- I can't do it: I don't know it; I haven't got it. (416)

Conversely, Mrs. Pryor does have the gift of understanding such "indefinite abstractions" as long-standing grief and mother-want, and is able to transcend her habitual reserve to supply her daughter's emotional needs. Aside from her maternal relationship to Caroline, she also bears affinity to her in that she too has suffered from male cruelty and disappointment in love, and her confession of her sufferings during her marriage signals the beginning of uninhibited communication between the two women. In Chapter Twenty-five, the reciprocal benefits of the mother-daughter relationship are quickly obvious. Caroline loses her resemblance to Mary Cave and is no longer in danger of being transformed into "a mere white mould, or

rigid piece of statuary" (420) like her unfortunate aunt. She also ceases to thirst constantly and again takes nourishment, the implication being that her emotional cravings are at last fulfilled. Nature imagery is now utilized positively to indicate recovery and spiritual rebirth as Caroline's convalescence is compared to the earth returning to its natural state after a period of violent tempest:

> The sun broke out genially, heaven regained its azure, and earth its green: the livid cholera-tint had vanished from the face of nature: the hills rose clear round the horizon, absolved from that pale malaria-haze. (419-20)

Mrs. Pryor finds Caroline's dependence on her equally salutary, and accordingly, "her frost fell away: her rigidity unbent" (422). The chapter ends on such a strong note of contentment that had the novel ended here and not reverted to its preoccupation with the marriage plots, Shirley might well be remembered as one of the first works to advocate a maternal-centered, manless female utopia.

The dominant theme in Chapters Eleven to Twenty-five is the beneficial as well as the problematical aspects of female bonding. Although Caroline's friendship with the outspoken and high-spirited Shirley provides a certain amount of relief from the "tormenting" and "racking" pains she suffers from unrequited love, it cannot eliminate her need for a heterosexual relationship or her longing for marriage. Caroline's primary desire is always the reciprocation of her passion for Robert; that Robert directs his attentions completely away from her and increasingly toward Shirley destroys the solace of this new friendship and merely serves to isolate her further. Shirley's vacillating attitude toward men reveals a distinct ambivalence in her character: at times she anticipates the New Woman of the late nineteenth-century, advocating independence from male dominance and discussing professions for women, but at others she eulogizes men whom she believes to be her superiors and denies the rather obvious fact that she is in love. Therefore, her status as

"liberated" woman free from the encumbrances of ingrained notions that women exist for marriage and domesticity is dubious at best. Because of their obvious need for male attention and recognition, the female utopia Shirley and Caroline hope to find in each other's company is for the most part an impossibility. It is successful only in isolated instances, such as their conversation on Nunnelly Common, a place which, significantly, is separate from the community and the distracting presence of men. Shirley envisions a sea voyage in which the girls can leave behind the "patriarchal bull" of authority, as well as the false male assumption of female identity as that of mermaid-temptress; but they never sail on that journey. Significantly, their failure to take this symbolic journey out of patriarchal culture and into a free world of their own occurs mainly because they have fallen prey to their dependence on men: Shirley remains at Fieldhead, waiting for Louis to appear, and Caroline falls ill of depressive love-sickness. However, the maternal bond which develops between Caroline and Mrs. Pryor proves to be a viable and lasting relationship. Since maternal love is centered exclusively on the connection between mother and child, it is unspoiled by male intrusion, and, the men in Caroline's life having failed her utterly and Shirley having temporarily disappeared, the love of her long-awaited absent mother serves to fill her emotional void and provide her with a will to live.

CHAPTER THREE: THE INVERSION OF THE ROMANTIC TRADITION

If one were being simplistic, one could sum up the last twelve chapters of Shirley as "developments which lead the heroines to the altar." However, the parallel plots which end in a double wedding between Caroline and Robert and Shirley and Louis are hardly simple to analyze, and, as I noted in the introduction to this paper, they have caused a considerable amount of critical consternation. That Caroline marries Robert after he has been chastened comes as no real surprise, as she is a conventional heroine in search of conventional marriage, although questions remain as to the true extent of Robert's supposed moral reformation. However, there are a number of contradictory developments in the courtship between Shirley and Louis, who proves to be an enigmatic figure, quiet and submissive in his dependent role as tutor, but also determined and domineering, particularly in relation to Shirley. Shirley herself also becomes a mysterious figure, the split in her subjective self becoming ever more obvious. Never a conventional heroine, she vacillates wildly in the last third of the novel: she is at various times both haughty landowner and eager schoolgirl; idealistic "honest woman" staunchly refusing to marry for rank or money; and weak fainting heroine content to let Louis do the talking. Finally, there is the analogy of Louis' subjugation of the untamed Shirley into submissive wife with that of Robert's taming of the land by industry, a connection which is the major source of unification between the "personal" and "social" aspects of the novel. These parallel developments are not easy ones for either brother to accomplish, and the respective outcomes of their endeavours are of questionable value: Shirley becomes a vague, childlike creature torn between her natural inclination to independence and her adherence to her master/lover, whilst the natural beauty of the landscape is reduced to the paved streets and sooty roads of Robert's vision.

Louis is immediately established as Other, as much the isolated governess-figure as was Mrs. Pryor among the Hardmans. The Sympsons treat him with "proper dignity," the father being "austerely civil, sometimes irritable"; the mother "attentive but formal," the daughters indifferent to his learning and talents; and Shirley (although for the vastly different reason that she is resisting her attraction to him) "rarely recognised his existence" (429-30). Indeed, one could almost label him the novel's third heroine, for he has a traditionally feminine job and is as repressed as the female characters in the novel, as "his faculties seemed walled up in him, and were unmurmuring in their captivity" (430). Another of his female-identified traits is his partiality to the natural world, demonstrated by Shirley's dog Tartar's devotion to him, his obvious enjoyment of the "greenness and perfume" of Shirley's garden, and his nurturing habit of feeding small birds. However, his affinity with the female sector ends as soon as his struggle for supremacy over the formidable heiress of Fieldhead begins, for it becomes evident that he intends to renounce his dependent position and assume one of authority, particularly over Shirley. His power struggle with her manifests itself in minor but significant ways. He is first successful in attracting Tartar away from her despite her best efforts to lure him back, an act which symbolically initiates his appropriation of her property. During their scene together in the garden, there are broad hints that he can deflate and will eventually eradicate her haughtiness. Despite his actual status as dependent, he emphasizes his supremacy as man and son of Adam (appropriately enough in an edenic setting), overriding her assertion of her rights as property-owner:

> "With animals I feel I am Adam's son; the heir of him to whom dominion was given over "every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Your dog likes and follows me; when I go into that yard, the pigeons from your dove-cot flutter at my feet; your mare in the stable knows me as well as it knows you, and obeys me better."
>
> "And my roses smell sweet to you, and my trees give you shade."
>
> "And," continued Louis, "no caprice can withdraw these pleasures from me: they are *mine*." (433)

This exchange has clear affinities with Shirley's feminist revisionist myth of Eve; conversely, Louis' insistence upon Adam's (or man's) dominant position reverts the Adam and Eve myth to its original form in the Book of Genesis, with Eve, or woman, demoted to her customary inferior role, a development which symbolically links Louis to traditional notions of male superiority and is the first suggestion of Shirley's eventual regression to subordination. By playing the role of masterful, invulnerable male, although he is not yet in a position of authority and, as it transpires in the next chapter, is far from invulnerable to Shirley's charms, Louis is unquestioned victor in this first battle, one which he fights both with her and for her.

Thereafter, the relationship between Louis and Shirley assumes a pattern of Louis' progression in authority and Shirley's regression in maturity and independence. It soon becomes evident that their attraction to one another is based on a master/pupil power dynamic. The erotic dimension in the relationship between a male tutor figure and a young, relatively inexperienced female pupil has been the subject of a number of literary works (Jane Austen's Emma and Northanger Abbey, as well as Bronte's own The Professor and Villette are pertinent examples), and plays a vital role in Shirley. Through Shirley's cousin, Henry Sympson, who functions as a kind of secondary narrator by providing background information the novel's actual narrative persona has deliberately withheld, we learn that Shirley was Louis' pupil for two years during her adolescence and that her admiration of him stems from his mastery of French and drawing, in other words, from the accomplishments she herself lacks. Four years later, again falling gradually under Louis' tutelage and control despite initial resistance, Shirley becomes unappealingly submissive. In his presence, she is no longer "cool and lofty"; in fact, at the end of Chapter Twenty-six, she is seen kneeling before the fire, toasting bread for him and calmly allowing him to take the fork from her "with a sort of quiet authority, to which she submitted passively" (440). It is also intimated that she has

grown tired of the responsibility of playing the roles of lady and landowner, as she says when obliged to receive visitors whom she does not like, and implicitly, that she longs to exchange her position for a less demanding subordinate one, a hint which Louis is quick to discern:

> "Oh, for rest under my own vine and my own fig-tree! Happy is the slave-wife of the Indian chief, in that she has no drawing-room duty to perform, but can sit at ease weaving mats, and stringing beads, and peacefully flattening her picaninny's head in an unmolested corner of her wig-wam. I'll emigrate to the western woods."
>
> Louis Moore laughed.
>
> "To marry a White Cloud or a Big Buffalo; and after wedlock to devote yourself to the tender task of digging your lord's maize-field, while he smokes his pipe or drinks fire-water." (441)

Marriage themes and imagery grow increasingly prevalent as the Shirley/Louis plot progresses. It also becomes evident that Louis will be Shirley's choice as a mate, particularly when she states her reasons for refusing two marriage proposals to her uncle Sympson, who resembles a less intelligent version of Helstone, being a conventional authority figure who enjoys exercising non-existent control over his niece. To his protests that her rejection of the coarse-minded and dimwitted Samuel Wynne is "a presumption on your part" (444) because the man belongs to a wealthy, respectable family, Shirley spiritedly and sensibly argues in favor of esteem, admiration and love as a prerequisite to marriage. More interestingly, in the heated argument with Sympson which follows her refusal of Sir Philip Nunnelly, an amiable but boyish and weak young nobleman whose name signifies his obvious lack of sexual attractiveness to her, she defines her ideal of a husband in terms which state explicitly her adherence to the power dynamic of male mastery/female submission in marriage, one which she obviously finds extremely attractive:

> Did I not say I prefer a *master*? One in whose presence I shall feel obliged and disposed to be good. One whose control my impatient temper must acknowledge. A man whose approbation can reward -- whose displeasure punish me. A man I shall feel it impossible not to

love, and very possible to fear. (514)

This speech is a key one, probably Shirley's most self-revelatory account of her exceedingly contradictory personality. First, she virtually refutes Sympson's earlier claim that her tastes tend toward "swaggering, and subduing, and ordering, and ruling" (513), implicitly admitting that her masculine, proprietal roleplaying is just that -- a performance -- and that in actuality she adheres to the commonly-held notion of submissiveness as a desirable quality in a wife on condition that her husband is a man worthy of her respect. Her desire to be controlled and made "good" by her husband can be construed as an expression of her diffidence about what she perceives as her failings, particularly her "impatient temper." Louis, who is said to be able to check her "high reserve with a firm, quiet hand" (453) at will, is by her standards a far more eligible candidate than the gentle Sir Philip. Significantly, she goes on to say that the men she admires are learned philosophers and adventuring soldiers, in other words, what she aspires to be but is prevented from becoming because of gender restrictions. Therefore, Louis, who is learned and expresses a desire to become a pioneer and his own master in America, again proves a logical choice as her husband, for he is both scholar and potential ruler, and she can therefore achieve her goals through him.

Shirley's readiness for marriage with Louis -- if not her immediate acquiescence to his authority -- becomes rapidly apparent, first in the scene at Louis' sickbed. It is also at this point that she assumes a resemblance to Caroline, with whom she will share the fate of becoming the wife of one of the domineering Moores, and that sexual and bridal imagery are associated with her. As she enters Louis' bedroom, her "pure white dress" and gold chain "quivering on her breast," as well as her "chastened and pensive" (450) manner lend her the air of a demure bride on the brink of sexual submission to her husband. Her white dress and subdued manner also link her to Caroline, who also plays the role of nurse-figure when

Robert is injured, although with greater success. The sexual theme is extended with the implication that Louis' fever is a result of his longing for Shirley, combined with his jealousy of her attentions to Sir Philip. In fact, his illness is implicitly linked with Caroline's love-sickness when he describes it as a "miasma," a deliberate repetition of the term used with hers. His intention to punish Shirley is evident in his response to her various attempts to minister to him:

> I do not believe my illness is infectious: I scarcely fear (with a sort of smile) *you* will take it; but why should you run even the shadow of a risk? Leave me. (451).

Aside from exercising his mastery over her by ordering her out, his rejection of her signifies his belief that a positive response to him is unlikely given her supposed interest in Sir Philip, and, in his knowledge of her every move with him, his resentment over his rival's presence and depression over the supposed loss of Shirley to him. But in a sentence rich in metaphor, she indicates both reciprocal sexual attraction to him and her desire of attaining his approbation in her concern over his insomnia:

> But this sleep: I *should* like to woo it to your pillow -- to win for you its favor. (452)

Since the probable reason for Louis' sleeplessness is sexual longing, Shirley's expression of her wish to bring sleep to his bed (particularly in such terms as "woo") is perhaps revelatory of her own wish to satiate his sexual desire and possibly her own. Shortly thereafter, nature imagery signifies that Shirley is ready to change her virginal single state, first in the description of the alteration of the seasons from summer to autumn, implying progression and maturity as the year grows older, and symbolically, Shirley's similar process of growth and change from girl to woman. The russet woods which "stood ripe to be stript, but were yet full of leaf" (453), an image of the exchange of clothing for nakedness, perhaps conveys Shirley's growing

readiness for sexual initiation. The waning attraction of the single life is implied in her gathering of "These single flowers -- the last of their race" which she finds "a hueless and scentless nosegay" (454), a description which is a direct contrast to her first lively entrance with an apron full of flowers, and again suggests a transformation in her attitude. Significantly, she then rushes to Louis to read French with him at his request.

A vital clue as to the identity of the "real" Shirley -- which again, Louis does not fail to take note of -- is contained in her French devoir "La Premiere Femme Savante," in which she allegorically expresses her dissatisfaction with her own ignorance and anomalous position in society. In so doing, she again revises the Genesis myth of Adam and Eve (significantly, she calls the heroine Eva), but rather than creating a feminist version of this patriarchal text, she creates one of female submission to a dominant male based on her personal need for a strong mate who will tutor and correct her. Clearly, Eva, or Humanity, is Shirley's self-portrait. Physically, Eva is described in conjunction with nature, as is Shirley throughout the novel; her mind is "a clear, candid page" (457) eager for knowledge but lacking a teacher; and she is an orphan, separated from her tribe, indicating Shirley's own parentless and husbandless state. Shirley's diffidence and self-consciousness about her lack of formal education (which, incidentally, is another link with Caroline), is stated implicitly:

> You see in the desolate young savage nothing vicious or vacant; she haunts the wood harmless and thoughtful: though of what one so untaught can think, it is not easy to divine. (457)

This statement is another key to the state of Shirley's mind: she is "desolate" about her lack of learning and undefined place in the world, and so uses her enigmatic facades as child of nature and male manque as a means of hiding her insecurity. Her depiction of the rescue of Eva/Humanity by the lover/mentor Genius is clearly

an expression of her own wish-fulfilment in which she is given an identity by the dominant male of her fantasies, as well as moral and intellectual improvement, transformations which Genius appears to be able to make automatically:

> I take from thy vision, darkness: I loosen from thy faculties, fetters! I level in thy path, obstacles: I, with my presence, fill vacancy: I claim as mine the lost atom of life: I take to myself the spark of soul -- burning, heretofore, forgotten! (459)

Obviously, Shirley has projected a romance for herself in which her defects will be ameliorated until she is perfected and reaches a divine state, a fiction which reverses Caroline's story about her hoped-for marriage with Robert, in that in Shirley's version, it is the male who provides moral guidance.

Despite this alteration in traditional gender roles, Shirley's designation of the male figure as Genius and the female figure as Humanity indicates her adherence to at least one ingrained notion of the division of the moral roles of the sexes, namely, that of the male world as one of dominance and intellect, and the female sphere that of humane sensibility. It is perhaps this submissive attitude which makes the answer to the devoir's final question, "Who shall, of these things, write the chronicle?" (460) an obvious one, particularly in light of the fact that Louis soon takes over a large portion of the narrative. Shirley will never write her own story, for in her ignorance, she is unaware of her ability to create:

> She does not know her dreams are rare -- her feelings peculiar: she does not know, has never known, and will die without knowing, the full value of that spring whose bright fresh bubbling in her heart keeps it green. (374)

Louis, the personification of male dominance and intellect, does possess full self-awareness as well as the power of the pen, and will use these abilities to finish her chronicle for her, although not in the way she anticipates. Rather than loosening

the fetters of her intellectual and creative abilities, to borrow her own phrase, he will use his power to fetter them more thoroughly.

Judging by Shirley's behaviour in this chapter and the one following, Genius is clearly meant to be an idealized representation of Louis, to whom she rapidly begins to submit. During their French lesson, she willingly regresses to her former role as his pupil, pushing her hair behind her ears and reciting at his command. In the "Phoebe" chapter, in which she is bitten by a dog she fears rabid, he is the only person she entrusts with her secret, and finally, with her life. After coaxing the story of the dogbite from her, he plays the reassuring role of father/lover, listening patiently and even agreeing to her request that he administer a lethal dose of laudanum to her if she goes mad. Later, after making inquiries about the dog, he tells her only that the animal is harmless despite rumors to the contrary, at which point she makes a further regression, this time to a near-childlike state, in which "her heart became as lightsome, her manner as careless, as those of a little child, that, thoughtless of its own life or death, trusts all responsibility to its parents" (566).

Charlotte Brontë is well known for creating male characters who provoke an ambivalent response from readers: William Crimsworth in The Professor is rather cold and sometimes dislikable; Mr. Rochester in Jane Eyre is, for all his attractive qualities, domineering and sexually unruly; and Monsieur Paul in Villette is often a voyeuristic petty tyrant. In relation to these characters, Louis can be described as a hybrid of Crimsworth, in that he is quiet, poor, and outwardly cool-mannered, and Monsieur Paul, in that his love for Shirley sometimes takes the dubious form of spying on her and continually correcting her. Liké these two characters, Louis is emphatically not an archetypal romance hero as defined by Janice Radway, whose Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture makes an extensive study of the qualities which constitute the hero-figure. According to Radway, the ideal hero exudes "spectacular masculinity," and is usually reserved or

even cruel toward the heroine until transformed into a more tender being by her love (128-29). While reserved and sometimes cruel in his manner toward Shirley, Louis hardly fits the definition of spectacular masculinity: aside from his dependent status, he is quiet and unobtrusive, and, as he admits himself, sexually inexperienced. Although he does undergo a major transformation, it is to a more powerful position of mastery rather than to greater tenderness, and although Shirley provides the motivation for this change, he is more responsible for the alteration in his circumstances than she, for he deliberately plots to win her.

Unlike a typical romantic hero, Louis is not a particularly attractive character; in fact, he is often quite the reverse. In the "Louis Moore" chapter, much of which he narrates himself, he reveals his real feelings and intentions toward Shirley, many of which are highly questionable, particularly to a modern reader. Like Monsieur Paul, he reveals some distinctly voyeuristic tendencies by stealing into her bedroom when she is out, and there writing a sort of confessional. Clearly, he has made her the object of his male gaze, illicitly writing about her as she has forbidden him to do when she tells him specifically in the "Phoebe" chapter, "Do not choose me as the object of your text" (474).

His notes about the present state of their relationship reveal explicitly his enjoyment of the power he holds over her, and implicitly, his plan to marry her. His description of her helplessness after the dogbite images her as a child, "an unsophisticated untaught thing" (488), and he takes pleasure in her vulnerability, for it gives him an opportunity to sustain her "as a husband should sustain his wife" (488). He also relishes his knowledge of her imperfections because they allow him to "mount to ascendancy" (488) over her, an image which perhaps foreshadows his eventual sexual mastery over her after their marriage. It is also evident that he sees his vocation as that of her tutor, a role which, one strongly suspects, he will continue to play for the duration of their marriage.

However, Louis is disturbed by the knowledge that Shirley has the capability to ensnare him. In his fable of Semele reversed, he images himself as a lonely watcher, a priest of Juno in love with an idol, Saturnia, who eventually destroys him. An argument can be made for the use of encoded sexual imagery: the shock of heaven and earth is perhaps a metaphor for Louis' newly-awakened sexuality, or even orgasm; the "insufferable glory burning between the pillars" (491) phallic imagery denoting his own sexual longing and repression; and finally, Saturnia, who remains "chaste, grand, untouched" (492) with the ashes of the priest at her feet a projection of his own devastation and Shirley's triumph should he allow her and his sexual needs to gain mastery over him. Accordingly, he secures his own superior position by a further invasion of her privacy -- petty thievery, stealing her possessions in order to make her think she has lost them -- thereby placing her in a dependent position in relation to him:

> Let me lock up the desk and pocket the keys: she will be seeking them to-morrow: she will have to come to me. I hear her --
> "Mr. Moore, have you seen my keys?"
> So she will say in her clear voice, speaking with reluctance, looking ashamed, conscious that this is the twentieth time of asking. I will tantalize her: keep her with me, expecting, doubting; and when I do restore them, it shall not be without a lecture. Here is the bag, too, and the purse; the glove -- pen -- seal. She shall wring them all out of me slowly and separately: only by confession, penitence, entreaty. I never can touch her hand, or a ringlet of her head, or a ribbon of her dress, but I will make privileges for myself: every feature of her face, her bright eyes, her lips, shall go through each change they know, for my pleasure: display each exquisite variety of glance and curve, to delight -- thrill -- perhaps, more hopelessly to enchain me. If I *must* be her slave, I will not lose my freedom for nothing. (492)

It is this image of Louis as a sort of puppet-master, controlling Shirley's every move and ensnaring her to ensure his own freedom, that makes him a morally ambiguous character. The objects he takes are also emblematic of his intentions to appropriate her and render her powerless: the keys representing access to property; the purse her money; the pen her ability to write; and the seal with which she seals documents her legal right to act for herself. Upon reading this chapter, the reader's

reservations as to whether he is good for Shirley (unless, like Louis himself, he or she is of the opinion that Shirley needs taming) turn into severe doubts. The seizure of her possessions is more than mere voyeurism or a petty game: it is a violation of her private self meant to bring her to a state of total helplessness and submission.

Parallel to the Shirley/Louis courtship plot runs the one between Caroline and Robert, as well as the story of Robert's reformation. Whilst the Shirley/Louis plot occupies Chapters Twenty-six to Twenty-nine, as well as several of the final chapters, Robert's near-death and redemption provide a break in the intensity of the power struggle between Shirley and Louis by furnishing a considerable amount of tension of its own. Interestingly, Robert's confessional directly follows Louis', but is made in an entirely different manner. Whereas Louis emphasizes his present state and, implicitly, his future triumph, Robert's admission of his past moral blunders to Yorke is made with what is for him remarkable humility. In his recounting of the scene in which Shirley rejects his marriage proposal, woman is again envisioned as a moral guide, a redemptive alternative to the corrupt world of commerce. When Yorke chides him about staying away long enough to lose Shirley to Sir Philip Nunnelly (referring to her as "first prize" in Fortune's Wheel because she is worth twenty thousand pounds, 495), Robert reveals the humiliation he felt at Shirley's angry refusal of a proposal she knew was made for economic reasons. He then vows that "never more will I mention marriage to a woman, unless I feel love. Henceforth, Credit and Commerce may take care of themselves" (501). His self-loathing at his own immaturity reiterates Shirley's earlier description of him to Caroline as "six feet of puppyhood" (264) as he describes himself as "such a fool and such a knave -- such a brute and such a puppy" (502). Interestingly, his future plans now that he faces financial ruin -- to "work diligently, wait patiently, bear steadily" (502) -- closely resemble a letter written by Charlotte Brontë in 1848, a year before the publication of Shirley, concerning the obligations of single women:

> When a woman has a little family to rear and a household to conduct, her hands are full, her vocation is evident; when her destiny isolates her, I suppose she must do what she can, live as she can, complain as little, bear as much, work as well as possible. (Letter to W.S. Williams, May 12, 1848, Wise, 216)

Robert, surrounded by debts and threatened with the almost certain loss of his business, is as much an anomaly as any single woman, and so adopts Brontë's feminine creed of fortitude. Moreover, judging by his description of the misery and desperation he has witnessed among the unemployed workers of Birmingham and London, he has also learned compassion for the poor, and his new attitude toward the working classes is closer to Shirley's sympathy for the rioters after the mill battle rather than to his former insistence on vengeance:

> Something there is to look to, Yorke, beyond a man's personal interest: beyond the advancement of well-laid schemes; beyond even the discharge of dishonouring debts. To respect himself, a man must believe he renders justice to his fellow-men. Unless I am more considerate to ignorance, more forbearing to suffering, than I have hitherto been, I shall scorn myself as grossly unjust. (506)

Ironically, immediately after making this statement, a brutal version of Yorkshire justice is meted out to him as he is shot and nearly killed for his persecution of the ringleaders of the mill rioters. For his reformation, he must undergo further stages of suffering and understanding before reaching a full state of moral redemption.

In the section dealing with Robert's painful physical and emotional recovery, Brontë repeats the motif previously used in Jane Eyre of physically damaging the hero as part of his process of moral amelioration. Whereas Rochester's blinding and maiming are in the view of many critics punishments for pride and sexual misconduct which bring him closer to the once-powerless status of the heroine Jane, Robert's wounding subjects him to the full horrors of the patriarchy, a structure in which he has enthusiastically participated. He is first reduced to a physical state of helplessness which is literally akin to the powerlessness inherent in the lives of those the patriarchy controls, mainly women (especially ones without fortune like

Caroline) and landless men, in the reductive imagery applied to him immediately after the shooting: he is described as a "youth," "a speechless bleeding youth," "a tall straight shape prostrated in its pride across the road," and his head is "laid low in the dust" (523). From here, he is taken to a place most unconducive to a pleasant recovery, Briarmains, by Mr. Yorke, who unsurprisingly finds the situation much to his taste:

> Well did Mr. Yorke like to have power, and to use it: he had now between his hands power over a fellow-creature's life: it suited him. (523)

Thereafter, Robert passes through the care of a number of the novel's most repugnant representatives of patriarchal (and matriarchal) authority until he is eventually reduced to an object completely under their control. To the supreme matriarch Mrs. Yorke, he is infant-like, "left in her arms, as dependent on her as her youngest-born in the cradle" (524). She is also allowed further opportunities to exercise her well-developed penchant for giving orders by refusing to admit most of his visitors, thus isolating him from sympathetic human contact. Her one virtue is that she at least regards him as human: his next caretaker, the aptly-named doctor MacTurk, is incapable of seeing his patient as anything more than "a damaged piece of clock-work, which it would be creditable to his skill to set a-going again" (526), thus further demoting Robert's status to that of mechanical object. The unkindest cut of all, however, occurs when MacTurk sends his surrogate, the ferocious Mrs. Horsfall, to nurse him. In regard to the theme of women in the patriarchy, she is an important character, being a combination of male authority figure and monstrous matriarch. Unlike Shirley, who gains in charm and by no means loses her feminity by her male roleplaying, Mrs. Horsfall's masculinity is no pretense: she smokes, drinks, and behaves as roughly as any of the men in the novel. Whereas Shirley's masquerade as "Captain Keeldar" is a ploy used to manipulate the men in her environment and is usually only temporarily effective, Mrs. Horsfall attains real and

permanent power by her replication of male behaviour, and by complying absolutely with patriarchal expectations. To Robert's protest that "that woman was a dram drinker," Dr. MacTurk replies that she has one virtue: "She always remembers to obey *me*" (527). She is also a parodically fierce mother-figure, so brutal in her care that one is surprised that her "son" survives:

> In the commencement of his captivity, Moore used feebly to resist Mrs. Horsfall: he hated the sight of her rough bulk, and dreaded the contact of her hard hands; but she taught him docility in a trice. She made no account whatever of his six feet -- his manly thews and sinews: she turned him in his bed as another woman would have turned a babe in its cradle. When he was good, she addressed him as "my dear," and "honey"; and when he was bad, she sometimes shook him. Did he attempt to speak when MacTurk was there, she lifted her hand and bade him "hush!" like a nurse checking a forward child. (526)

In effect, Robert becomes akin to Caroline: immobile, silenced, and accorded a child-like status. Interestingly, his situation is seen mainly from the viewpoint of his captors, so that in effect, his personality loses significance except as the object they hover and work over. Finally, his identity is all but eradicated, as his opinions and emotions become of no consequence to anyone but himself.

In a neat and entirely appropriate reversal of circumstances, Caroline finds Robert in much the same hopeless condition as herself during her own illness, in other words, emotionally starved for love and comfort. As she enters his room at Briarmains, she sees "a tall, thin, wasted figure" (540), with hollow eyes and cheeks, who speaks about his "terrible depressions" and his certainty that he will die. Here, Caroline is the same nurturing combination of mother and nurse that Mrs. Pryor was, becoming a positive force urging Robert to live ("I *will* alter this: this *shall* be altered, were there ten Mrs. Yorkes to do battle with," she stoutly declares, 541). However, she makes an unfortunate, if apt, choice of words in reassuring him that "you shall go home to the Hollow" (541), for the name of Robert's so-called home is

not only emblematic of his physical state but of his status as Economic Man facing financial ruin. Although Caroline's visit stimulates him to physical recovery and hence the strength to leave Briarmains, he is a forlorn figure as he stands outside Hollow's Cottage and surveys the options left to him:

> A cold, grey, yet quiet world lies around -- a world where, if I hope little, I fear nothing. All slavish terrors of embarrassment have left me: let the worst come, I can work, as Joe Scott does, for an honourable living: in such doom, I yet see some hardship, but no degradation. (554)

This melancholy musing is Brontë's moral lesson on the follies of competitive capitalism and obsession with the acquisition of wealth to the exclusion of all else: having rejected human companionship in favor of his business aspirations, Robert is left with nothing when his ambitions fail to materialize. Like several of the other characters, he decides that a potential solution to his problem lies in renunciation of the traditional socio-economic structure, and in emigration to America:

> Ruin will come, lay her axe to my fortune's roots, and hew them down. I shall snatch a sapling, I shall cross the sea, and plant it in American woods. (555)

But again, owing to his obsession with economic gain above human considerations, his journey may well be a lonely one:

> Louis will go with me. Will none but Louis go? I cannot tell -- I have no right to ask. (555)

He is referring, of course, to Caroline and his previous ill-treatment of her, and of the need for atonement before any union between them is possible. But Caroline is loyal, and therein lies hope for him, as demonstrated by the reconciliatory conversation between the two as they spend his first evening at Hollow's Cottage together, as well as Caroline's adoring refusal to censure him for trying to marry Shirley for her fortune.

The conversation between Caroline and Robert also reintroduces the

Shirley/Louis theme. In fact, Shirley becomes a predominant topic of discussion amongst Caroline, Robert, and especially Louis over most of the rest of the novel, but it is significant that, like Robert after his wounding, she is viewed by the other characters rather than represented by herself or the narrator. The indirect representation of her in the narrative is indicative, as it was with Robert, of the nullification of her identity during the events that lead to a major crisis for her, namely, her marriage. Her growing resemblance to Caroline is also very much in evidence. Having wrung a confession from Shirley as to the object of her affections, Caroline exults:

> Shirley is a bondswoman. Lioness! She has found her captor. Mistress she may be of all round her -- but her own mistress she is not. (562)

Again, emphasis is placed upon Shirley's roleplaying as an illusion: just as her masculinity was false, so is her show of control over her emotions. As Robert recognizes, she is, like Caroline, "a fellow slave" to love (or masculine authority) despite her "fair and imperial demeanour" (562). Caroline refuses to comment on Robert's accurate reading of her own emotional state, but makes a pertinent biblical allusion when she states, "I say haughty Shirley is no more free than was Hagar," to which Robert replies, "And who, pray, is the Abraham; the hero of a patriarch who has achieved such a conquest?" (562). This exchange is made in a light, bantering tone, but the implications are disturbing, for the story of Hagar in the Book of Genesis is that of a bondmaid who is also a helpless child-bearing vessel, and a woman censured for pride and self-assertion. In short, the allusion is a grim foreshadowing of Shirley's future role as wife, which in this social environment means that she will become a landless chattel legally (and with Louis, emotionally) under the control of her husband. The association of Louis with Abraham merely enforces the image of him as patriarch and ruler, although given his methods of

ascendancy over Shirley, one questions the status of hero accorded to him by Robert. It is rather discouraging to note that male/female relations have not changed much since biblical times. Perhaps the most distasteful element of this conversation is, however, the tone in which it is conducted. Caroline "*quite, quite*" (563) approves of Shirley's choice, and Mrs. Pryor claims that "such a choice will make the happiness of Miss Keeldar's life" (564). Such attitudes are indicative of the novel's ambiguity. On one hand, that two people who genuinely care for Shirley should approve of her union with Louis is reassuring to readers who either disapprove of her marriage to someone of a lower social station or those who find Louis' treatment of her dubious during their odd courtship. On a more subversive level, however, Caroline's delight in what is essentially Shirley's subjugation to male authority is indicative of the false and damaging assumptions held about women at that time: namely, that a single and independent life is to be avoided at all costs, and that only as a submissive wife to a controlling male can woman fulfil society's expectations of her. One can scarcely blame Caroline for her happiness in Shirley's decision to submit to love, for marriage is the ultimate goal of her own life, and she accepts the restrictions that coexist with such a role. But one doubts that such limitations will prove suitable for Shirley.

In a passionate and imagery-laden penultimate chapter called "Written in the Schoolroom," Louis, still the master/tutor, again subjects Shirley to his dissecting gaze in the form of a diary. In his writings, he details the formidable obstacles he has overcome in order to win her, most of which stem from mutual pride. Louis wants to be the dominant partner in the marital relationship he envisions with Shirley, to renounce his dependent status once and for all, and assume what he considers to be his rightful place as authority figure, especially over Shirley; conversely, the "lioness," "leopardess," "pantheress" Shirley proves to be extremely difficult to tame. Louis' main task is to elicit a love declaration from her which she

is determined not to utter, despite the provocations he throws in her way. Although the outcome of their power struggle is predictable given Louis' ability to control Shirley's behaviour and the reader's prior knowledge of her emotional attachment to him, the narrative is complicated by their evasive exchanges and imagery denoting Shirley's imprisoning loss of freedom. This is certainly no conventional match; in fact, to many readers, it may seem a fatal mistake on Shirley's part. Louis proves himself a master of metaphor: when speaking of his intentions to go to America in order to follow freedom "deep into virgin woods" where "Liberty will await me, sitting under a pine" (570-1), he is in actuality speaking of his marital designs on Shirley, who has often been equated with virginity, nature and liberty. Similarly, the "young, penniless, friendless orphan girl" (572) he dreams of marrying is analogous to her, for she is young, isolated, and orphaned, and when married will be penniless, for by law her fortune will pass to her husband. Louis' description of his ideal marriage partner is also directed at her, and calculated to elicit an emotional response:

> I wish I could find such a one: pretty enough for me to love, with something of the mind and heart suited to my taste: not uneducated -- honest and modest. I care nothing for attainments; but I would fain have the germ of those sweet natural powers which nothing acquired can rival: any temper Fate wills, – I can manage the hottest. To such a creature as this, I should like to be first tutor and then husband. I would teach her my language, my habits, and my principles, and then I would reward her with my love. (572)

This speech is deliberately unsubtle and arrogant in tone, but serves its purpose, for Shirley's composure is broken and she reacts angrily. Moreover, it reflects her own previously-stated ideal of marriage: Louis is able to manage her temper; the knowledge she possesses has been imbibed from him; and as she has confessed to Caroline, she loves him and therefore presumably desires to be rewarded with reciprocal love. The two are also excellently suited in another sense, for both share

equality of status, or rather a lack of status, as they admit:

> Louis: I am a dependent: I know my place.
> Shirley: I am a woman: I know mine.
> Louis: I am poor: I must be proud.
> Shirley: I have received ordinances, and own obligations as stringent as yours. (573-4)

But, as Louis realizes, "she would not give in" (574), and so his next strategy is to lead her to a confession of the reasons for her rejection of Sir Philip Nunnelly after suggesting that she improve his lamentable artistic taste. While scornfully mocking such an idea, she also admits her reluctance to assume an authoritative role which she believes rightfully belongs to men, and again, her diffidence:

> Leading and improving! teaching and tutoring! bearing and forebearing! Pah! My husband is not to be my baby. I am not to set him his daily lesson and see that he learns it, and give him a sugarplum if he is good, and a patient, pensive, pathetic lecture if he is bad. But it is like a tutor to talk of the "satisfaction of teaching" -- I suppose you think it the finest employment in the world. I don't -- I reject it. Improving a husband! No. I shall insist upon my husband improving me, or else we part. (575)

Modern feminist readers might well label this speech "Shirley's downfall," for again, she implicitly reveals her adherence to culturally ingrained notions of male mastery/female submission as the only desirable condition of marriage, and her own desire for a relationship which will conform to this pattern. That she reveals this state of mind to Louis allows him to retain the upper hand, first by playing on her low self-esteem by telling her bluntly that improvement is imperatively needed. Despite Shirley's continued resistance, which now takes the form of taunting him for his poverty and self-consciousness about his physical appearance, he turns her intended insult about his resemblance to her dog Tartar to his own advantage by pointing out her great affection for the animal, and then telling her that "It is dangerous to say I am like Tartar: it suggests to me a claim to be treated like Tartar" (576). He then reverts to deliberate provocation by describing the taming process to which he intends to subject his orphan girl, as well as boldly demanding

that Shirley reveal that the identity of this supposedly unknown character is in fact herself. Although she is tempted to end what is becoming one of the most convoluted courtship scenes in Victorian literature (Mr. Rochester's disguise as a gypsy in Jane Eyre seems a relatively simple contrivance in comparison), she resolutely tells him that "I *never will*" (576) identify this tractable maiden with herself. Louis decides that the time for metaphorical hedging (some might say bullying) has ended:

> She turned to leave me. Could I now let her part as she had always parted from me? No: I had gone too far not to finish. I had come too near the end not to drive home to it. All the encumbrance of doubt, all the rubbish of indecision must be removed at once, and the plain truth must be ascertained. She must take her part, and tell me what it was. I must take mine, and adhere to it. (576)

Louis removes the "rubbish of indecision" by direct confrontation and more than a little force; in short, by becoming the manifestation of what Shirley most respects and fears: male authority. His roleplaying meets with the desired response when he demands the truth from her:

> "I would almost rather die than let you leave me just now, without speaking the word I demand."
> "What dare you expect me to say?"
> "What I am dying and perishing to hear; what I *must* and *will* hear; what you dare not now suppress."
> "Mr. Moore, I hardly know what you mean: ~~you are~~ not like yourself."
> I suppose I hardly was like my usual self, for I scared her; that I could see: it was right; she must be scared to be won.
> "You *do* know what I mean, and for the first time I stand before you *myself*. I have flung off the tutor, and beg to introduce you to the man: and remember, he is a gentleman."
> She trembled. She put her hand to mine as if to remove it from the lock; she might as well have tried to loosen, by her soft touch, metal welded to metal. She felt she was powerless, and receded; and again she trembled. (577)

His pose as man and gentleman is partly a pretense, for he is more the tutor than ever, a role which he is well aware that Shirley responds to with awe. Her tone throughout this exchange indicates that she is thoroughly intimidated, and has, as

Louis says, "receded." Although she is a grown woman, she regresses into a shy schoolgirl, and it is in this capacity that she defines herself in relation to Louis:

> "My pupil," I said.
> "My master," was the low answer. (577)

While demanding a full love declaration from her, Louis deliberately informs her that her keys are in his possession, an appropriation which is another act of mastery on his part, for without them she has no access to money -- the only true power she possesses -- and so she is literally transformed into his "penniless, friendless young orphan girl." She is also reduced to his own poverty-stricken state, leading to a disturbing exchange between the two:

> "And are we equal then, sir? Are we equal at last?"
> "You are younger, frailer, feebler, more ignorant than I."
> "Will you be good to me, and never tyrannize?"
> "Will you let me breathe, and not bewilder me?" (578-9)

His answer to both her questions is evasively negative, strongly suggesting that he considers himself the superior partner and does mean to exercise tyranny (hopefully of a benevolent sort) over her. More dismaying still is Shirley's acceptance of the conditions he imposes upon her: referring to herself in his terms as a leopardess, she declares, "I am glad I know my keeper, and am used to him. Only his voice will I follow; only his hand shall manage me; only at his feet will I repose" (579). Indeed, at first she appears to take genuine pleasure in her new role as Louis' dependent, sitting by his side in an ultra-conventional female pose, sewing, and then taking his arm in her uncle's presence and proudly announcing, "I am near my future husband. Who dares touch him or me?" (582). During the hysterical rage from Sympson and the physical battle between him and Louis which follows, she slips into the conventional heroinely role suitable to a melodramatic situation such as this one and collapses, although not before giving Louis a "divine smile" to reassure him that she is merely acting a part. Her delight is entirely understandable given the longing she expresses earlier for "danger; for a faith -- a land -- or, at least, a lover to

defend" (299). Danger arrives in the form of a bewildering new condition of life, marriage, and with it the equally foreign role of wife. Her faith is now put in Louis, whom she relies upon to "Be my companion through life; be my guide where I am ignorant: be my master where I am faulty; be my friend always!" (580). She defends her land by asking Louis to help her share in its management, and to "show me how to sustain my part <as landowner and landlord> well" (580). And finally, she now has a lover to defend to a world which is, like Mr. Sympson, likely to react with hostility to the idea of a wealthy heiress marrying her penniless tutor.

The novelty of Shirley's engagement soon fades, and the effects of the transformation of her personality into one conforming to Louis' expectations become disturbing, to say the least. Shirley's desire to change her independent way of life almost immediately diminishes and she withdraws from Louis. Again subjecting her to scrutiny in his diary, he uses some particularly appropriate imagery to describe the nature of her agitation:

> Pantheress! -- beautiful forest-born! -- wily, tameless, peerless nature! She gnaws her chain: I see the white teeth working at the steel! She has dreams of her wild woods, and pinings after virgin freedom. (584)

Once the danger and enjoyment of exciting Mr. Sympson's wrath have passed, Shirley's true independent nature quickly reemerges. As Louis watches her with Caroline and Mrs. Pryor, she is "spirit-like, - a thing made of an element" as well as "a thing never to be overtaken, arrested, fixed" (584-5). In other words, hardly a suitable candidate for marriage with the controlling figure Louis, with his habit of viewing her like a microscopic specimen. Her new identity is foreign and bewildering to her, as is the conventional male/female power dynamic which she is now forced to acknowledge. In an unsuccessful attempt to make the situation more agreeable to her, Louis strikes an easily-recognizable pose as courtly lover on bended knee (although he admits, "it would not have suited me to retain that attitude long," 585) which she also rejects as alien:

> You see I am in a new world, Mr. Moore. I don't know myself, -- I don't know you: but rise; when you do so, I feel troubled and disturbed. (585)

Again, her method of coping with anxiety is to regress to childlike behaviour, clinging to Louis as a father-figure; speaking in short, repetitive childish sentences; and desperately resisting the changes marriage will bring:

> I courted serenity and confidence for her, and not vainly: she trusted, and clung to me again.
> "Now, Shirley," I said, "you can conceive I am far from happy in my present uncertain unsettled state."
> "Oh, yes: you *are* happy!" she cried, hastily: "you don't know how happy you are! -- any change will be for the worse!"
> "Happy or not, I cannot bear to go on so much longer: you are too generous to require it."
> "Be reasonable, Louis, -- be patient! I like you because you are patient."
> "Like me no longer, then, -- love me instead: fix our marriage-day. Think of it to-night, and decide."
> She breathed a murmur, inarticulate yet expressive; darted, or melted, from my arms -- and I lost her. (586)

Shirley's real unconsciousness -- directly opposed to her half-playful feigned collapse before Sympson -- is an obvious means of evading the responsibility of choosing her wedding day. More distressing is the description of her "melting," an act indicative of her obliteration of self when faced with Louis' demands. In the final chapter, her mental deterioration becomes increasingly evident, as she ceases to resist submission and in the process displays the vagueness and confusion of a newly-trapped animal, particularly after the wedding day is fixed:

> It had needed a sort of tempest-shock to bring her to the point; but there she was at last, fettered to a fixed day: there she lay, conquered by love, and bound with a vow.
> Thus vanquished and restricted, she pined, like any other chained denizen of deserts. Her captor alone could cheer her; his society only could make amends for the lost privilege of liberty: in his absence, she sat or wandered alone; spoke little, and ate less. (592)

These disconcerting images of the emotional bondage and paralysis which result from the loss of her freedom are partially mitigated by the narrator's insistence that she "also acted on system" and her later declaration that

"Louis...would never have learned to rule, if she had not ceased to govern: the incapacity of the sovereign had developed the powers of the premier" (592), but this is perhaps Brontë's "sugarplum" to members of her Victorian reading audience who preferred not to see the heroine's marriage -- almost always the comic/romantic climax of the novel at that time -- as an act of self-destruction. However, Caroline's description to Robert shortly thereafter of Shirley sitting alone and silent with "a look half wistful, half reckless, which sends you away as queer and crazed as herself" (593) is yet another indication that Shirley's identity has been largely nullified, and that in its place, little is left but a vague, listless vacuum.

The union between Caroline and Robert is portrayed somewhat less negatively, but again, reservations are expressed about this marriage, primarily through imagery. As Robert passes through a temporary state of humility after his recovery and return from Briarmains, he warns Caroline to "take care of your own heart" and admits, "Oh, Cary, I have no love to give. Were the goddess of beauty to woo me, I could not meet her advances: there is no heart which I can call mine in this breast" (565). Since he is in the midst of a bout of masochistic self-loathing, this statement is presumably meant to be taken with a grain of salt. Optimistic readers might also interpret him to mean that he has "no heart to give" because it belongs to Caroline. However, in the later proposal scene, questions again arise as to the extent of Robert's moral reformation and his ability to offer Caroline genuine affection. According to Gilbert and Gubar, who draw attention to the reiteration of stone imagery, the answer to the latter query is an unequivocal "no":

> Bronte is careful to develop the imagery she has established from the beginning of the novel, most especially the connection between stones and male lovelessness. The scene of the marriage proposal is set near a wall, next to the fragment of a sculptured stone, perhaps the base of a cross, a fitting symbol in this novel of female dispossession. Characteristically, Robert asks, "Is Caroline mine?" He wonders if she can care for him, "as if that rose should promise to shelter from tempest this hard, grey stone" (chap. 37). Still unable to love anyone except himself, he pictures Caroline as the perfect Sunday school

mistress for the cottagers he will employ at his expanded mill. (397)

In other words, his marriage is a matter of expedience, and for once, Caroline is a help to his plans instead of a hindrance. The motivating factor in his life is still money, but the repeal of the Orders in Council have lifted trade sanctions, meaning that he can now anticipate a surplus of business and profit, and therefore can consider marriage. The adoring, thoroughly respectable Caroline will not only make a suitable wife, but her virtuous nature will provide him with the spiritual guidance that nineteenth-century morality deemed necessary to counterbalance the unchristian world of business: she will bring him, he says, "a solace -- a charity -- a purity -- to which, of myself, I am a stranger" (595). Otherwise, she will have little to say about anything he does: significantly, the conferral of her in marriage is conducted between Robert, Mrs. Pryor and Helstone, without her presence. Having quickly dispensed with the themes of love and marriage, Robert proceeds to expound on the topic of his grandiose plans to join with Louis in becoming Briarfield's ruling force. Aided by Shirley's popularity and influence, not to mention her "infatuated fondness" for her husband, Louis will represent Law by becoming a magistrate, and he, Robert, Beneficient Commerce by expanding his mill and providing employment for the working classes. Shirley and Caroline will be relegated to personifying Benevolence by playing the purely subordinate roles of day and Sunday school teachers. Last but not least, the natural beauty of the landscape will be sacrificed to the needs of industry, as in Robert's unappealing description:

> The copse shall be firewood ere five years elapse: the beautiful wild ravine shall be a smooth descent; the green natural terrace shall be a paved street: there shall be cottages in the dark ravine, and cottages on the lonely slopes: the rough pebbled track shall be an even, firm, broad, black sooty road, bedded with the cinders from my mill: and my mill, Caroline -- my mill shall fill its present yard. (597)

Caroline's protests prove that the countryside is not the only thing Robert intends to tame: despite her horrified exclamations, she is ignored until she "mutely offered a kiss, an offer taken unfair advantage of, to the extortion of about a hundred kisses" (598), a prescient indication of her postmarital role, in which she will silently offer while Robert extorts. In the postscript to the novel, which takes place approximately thirty years later, the lives of the two women after their weddings are hinted at as the narrator's housekeeper Martha recalls Shirley and Caroline and refers to them simply as "Mrs. Louis" and "Mrs. Robert," an implicit suggestion that in the eyes of the community, their identities have been submerged into that of their husbands. Just as nothing is left of the natural world of Briarfield except Martha's recollection of the Hollow and the fairies which supposedly inhabited it, the remarkable heroine Shirley is reduced to Louis' appendage, with nothing left of her former self but "een that pierced a body through" (599).

The narrator's assurances that Robert's unlovely vision has materialized and that the Hollow "once green, and lone, and wild" has been transformed into "substantial stone and brick and ashes" (599) is an affirmation of the power of the male sphere. This conclusion is allegorical in a number of ways. First, the union of Shirley and Louis relates the novel's personal elements to the historical in its representation of both the rise of the middle classes and the subjugation of nature during the Industrial Revolution. That a man in Louis' humble position is able to win the proud and aristocratic Shirley and persuade her to submit to his authority is emblematic of the ascension of the middle class over the established ruling class. Aside from representing the change in traditional class structure, the taming of Shirley is also symbolic of man's mastery of nature for his own purposes. Although industry and commerce benefit, it is clear that just as Shirley's spirit is made dormant, the beauty of the natural world is transformed into something akin to Blake's "dark satanic mills." That the process of industrialization is an exceedingly

difficult task is made evident in Shirley's reluctance to accept her new role as submissive wife, a situation which can be viewed as analogous to the difficulties incurred by Robert in persuading the workers to accept a new world of machinery and progress vastly different from pre-industrial labor methods. The weavers yell in protest, break frames, and attack the mill to resist change and penetrate the callousness of the Economic Man Robert who now rules them, and Shirley longs for her premarital "virgin freedom" and gnaws at the chain binding her to Louis, but in the end both are subjugated and the new order of middle class industrialism triumphs. In fact, throughout the novel, the male sector consistently rules and wins over all opposition. Women, conversely, are always kept in the background, despite sporadic and largely ineffectual efforts by some of the female characters to break out of the passive roles assigned to them by patriarchy. Shirley, whose status as landowner affords her a certain degree of power, plays the male manqué and subjugates the male sector with her charm until she herself is subjugated by Louis. Caroline frequently contemplates the need for worthwhile work for women but never gets the chance to do anything but brood over injustices and wait for Robert. The older women Hortense Moore and Mrs. Yorke constantly exercise their domestic authority by endless nagging but are ultimately ineffective because they are so unpleasant that no-one pays any attention to them. Miss Mann and Miss Ainley work tirelessly to relieve the poor but are nonetheless ignored or scoffed at for being unattractive "old maids." Hope for the future of women appears to lie in two aspects explored in the novel, female bonding and the outspokenness and independent attitudes of the two Yorke girls Jessie and Rose. However, the sustenance Caroline and Shirley find in their friendship is short-lived, for suitors intrude, although Caroline finds lasting support from her new-found mother. Similarly, the option of an independent life for women posited by Jessie and Rose only partially materializes, for Jessie dies before she can realize her considerable

potential, and Rose must leave the country to escape patriarchal restrictions, and therefore does nothing to improve the status of women in her own country. Small wonder then that so many critics have left the novel puzzled and angry, feeling that it fails to deliver its revolutionary promise and degenerates into a conventional "romantic" ending designed to please conventional Victorian audiences. The fault, however, lies not with Brontë, who is merely following her creed of accordance with realism, but with a patriarchal society in which women are, to quote Rose Yorke, expected to "bury their talents" in favor of domestic servitude to men. This conclusion may be disappointing to many readers, but it is also an accurate and unflinching reflection of both the condition of women in the nineteenth-century as well as the gender apartheid which prevents any real unity between the male and female spheres.

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